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THE MATRIMONIAL LOTTERY

CHARLOTTE O'CONOR ECCLES

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THE MATRIMONIAL LOTTERY

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BY

CHARLOTTE O'CONOR ECCLES

AUTHOR OF

"THE REJUVENATION OF MISS SEMAPHORE"

LONDON

EVELEIGH NASH

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THE MATRIMONIAL LOTTERY

CHAPTER I

LOW WATER

"HANG it all!" said the young man gloomily, "I don't know where it will end."

He sat at a large writing-table in a room on the second floor of a huge block of buildings in Fleet Street. The apartment was fairly comfortable and unpleasantly warm. An ashy fire burned low in the grate. On the floor was a worn Turkey carpet. Of the three doors—having panels filled with ground glass—one led into the corridor, another into the outer office, and the third into a small apartment from which came the irritating click of a typewriter. On one of these doors the word 'Private' was inscribed in black letters, and on that leading into the corridor was added in fresher paint the name 'Mr. Darracott.'

Mr. Jack Darracott was now resting his head on his hands in deep depression. He was a good-looking young fellow, about eight-and-twenty, tall, strongly built, with kindly eyes and a

well-marked jaw. Just now he scarcely showed to advantage, for he had rumpled his hair by passing his hands through it, and this gave him an unflattering air of dissipation. He bit his pen and stared moodily out of the window, listening abstractedly to the roar of traffic below, and the shrill voices of boys crying 'Evenin' Speshul!'

The huge gold letters running across the front of the house, and obscuring his view, informed all whom it might concern that within was the office of *The Comet*. Darracott was proprietor of that unpopular weekly. The position had been thrust on him some six months previously by the death of an uncle, who had ruined a once successful paper by making it the mouthpiece of various fads.

When Jack, to his great satisfaction, learned that by his uncle's will the paper had been left to him, his joy was speedily damped. He had had no notion of *The Comet's* position until, as heir, he proceeded to examine the books. The number of 'returns' shocked him. The circulation had fallen to 10,000 a week, and was still dropping! His bill for paper alone absorbed all the income.

He dismissed his uncle's editor—a genteel person named Perkins—and took over a large share of the work himself. He cut down expenses as far as possible, still there were four pounds a week to be provided for his assistant's salary; thirty shillings a week for Miss Crane the typist, eight shillings for Boyle the office-boy, not to speak of reporters, News Agencies, outside contributors and printing. Rent, postage, and many other items remained

to be considered, and where was the money to meet them? The advertising columns brought in next to nothing. Many of the announcements were put in merely to fill space; others were continued long after the time actually paid for.

All the other newspaper men saw exactly how it stood with *The Comet*, and none of them would be surprised to hear any day that its publication had ceased.

Darracott was weary thinking out ways and means. The day after to-morrow would be Saturday, with weekly bills to be met, and his balance at the bank was perilously low. What was to be done? So ran his thoughts over and over again to the accompaniment of that eternal click-click next door, when suddenly the door leading into the corridor burst open and a tall, handsome young man strode in.

Darracott turned eagerly to him.

"Well?" he said briefly.

"Nothing very cheering, I'm sorry to say. Old M'Donald has withdrawn his advertisement. Says he gets no return for his money."

Jack groaned. "Another two guineas a week gone. What on earth are we to do? There's nothing coming in."

"Can't you borrow any money to go on with, eh?"

"Perhaps—but I won't on our present chances."

"Well, if we can but hold on for a while, I fancy everything is bound to come right in the end. The paper is a fine paper now, none better, if only the public could be persuaded to try it."

"Two big 'ifs,'" said Jack rather bitterly. "With the paper it's a case of 'Give a dog a bad name.' I put my best work into it, and no one reads a line of it except a few dozen old vegetarian cranks, who write me threatening letters for having abandoned my uncle's policy.

"What do you propose to do?"

"I haven't an idea. The outlook is dismal. Just before you came in I was thinking things over, but I could arrive at no conclusion, except that I would make a desperate final struggle. If that fails, we must go under. What form our last effort is to take I have been unable to decide. Can *you* suggest anything? You were always a smart chap in the old 'Varsity days."

"Was I? My smartness had not profited me much when you found me starving in a two-pair back, and made me your sub. Seems to me, Jack, I've gained more by *The Comet* than you, so far! You put me on my legs, and, by George! I'm grateful. I'd work for you like a nigger without pay, and my first suggestion is that you cut down my screw. I can live '*wie Gott in Frankreich*' on a pound a week."

"I won't do that," said Jack, "till I cut the whole thing. You do the work of four. You and I are practically the entire staff."

"And Boyle," interposed Hazlitt laughingly.

"And Boyle of course. We couldn't get on without him."

"As for work," went on Hazlitt, "how about yourself? You work harder than I do. You've put heaps of money and "go" into the paper from first to last, and you get nothing out of it at all.

Why do you stick to it? You can make enough to live on without it, and you'll have time to give to that wonderful novel of yours that is to revolutionise the world."

"Well," said Darracott hesitatingly, "I have my reasons. There's money in journalism, if only you succeed. A paper is a property. I haven't said a word about it to a soul, but I have been thinking lately of getting married. The girl is rich, and has been brought up in every comfort. She is not in the least mercenary, but I do not like to speak until I am in a position to offer her a home at least as good as her father's. Of course, you understand that this is confidential? She has no idea of my feelings, just looks on me as a friend. As you know, there is very little money to be made out of such books as I want to write. Were it only possible to make this *Comet* a financial success, my future would be assured.

At this moment Boyle knocked, and thrusting his head in at the door—he had a constitutional aversion for opening doors wider than was absolutely necessary—said—

"Please, sir, Count MacCarthy de Burgo."

"Your Irish friend?" said Hazlitt.

"Yes."

"What brings him here?"

"Probably the desire to offer us some articles on Central Africa. He was speaking about them last week. He knows the ground, for he has been all over the world, and he has a pretty knack of descriptive writing. You remember his excellent accounts of Rio?"

"But we can't take them, can we?"

"I wish we could, for as usual he's in low water, but this is a bad time. We can't incur any more expense at present."

"'Count'? how comes an Irishman to be a Count?"

"I really can't remember, but he told me all about it—it's genuine enough. He got it in Brazil, I believe, or perhaps it was his father, who was a Papal Zouave. You ask him some day, but don't say I had forgotten. Show him in, Boyle."

CHAPTER II

COUNT MACCARTHY DE BURGO

A TALL, florid, soldierly-looking man, heavily built, with broad shoulders, a beaming, good-natured countenance, reddish hair, and a huge drooping moustache of the same colour, was ushered in with great solemnity by Boyle. He was dressed in a suit of light tweed, wore a round hat, and carried a gold-headed cane.

He entered smiling, but stopped short when he saw the gloomy faces of the two young men.

"Tell me the worst, me boy!" he exclaimed with the air of one who was ready to brave whatever fate might have in store. "Tell me the worst. Sure I'm prepared for it. Don't beat about the bush! Is it done up y'are?"

"Pretty nearly," said Jack, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "We were just discussing the position."

"Faith, if I can be of iny use, Darracott," said the Count solemnly, "I'll stand by you. If there's inything to be done in the way of keeping out bailiffs, or provisioning the place, I'm y'r man."

"We haven't come to that—yet," replied Jack,

with a faint smile. "When we arrive at it I'll let you know."

"You couldn't do better," said the Count seriously, "I've had a deal of experience."

He spoke with the unctuous but not unpleasing brogue of a travelled Irishman who has preserved his national idiom and accent. In his sing-song was something friendly and coaxing. There is a great gulf fixed between the Irishman who calls 'one' 'wan,' and him who pronounces it tightly as 'wün,' between those who say 'anny' and those who say 'iny.' Count MacCarthy de Burgo belonged to the latter section.

"As to those African articles," went on the Count, "I came to ask if you'd take them?"

"I fear we can't," said Jack. "We are cutting down expenses on every side, and——"

"Man alive! do you think I want you to pay for them? Take them if they're iny good to you, and you can settle up when you're rich."

"But I really can't let you——"

"Say no more about it, or I'll be angry. Now not a word. And so things are no better?"

"Not they. Worse if possible. We're on our last legs I fear."

"So am I, me boy. So am I. I'd do inything this minute for a fortune. My case is despirate, but 'tis chronic with me, and you're new to it, and I sympathise. Yes, faith, I sympathise. That old uncle of yours had no business to go playing ducks and drakes with a fine property. Confound relations, say I. Sure I was left meself with an estate that was mortgaged up to the hilt, just the

name of the thing, you know, an' the land, the poorest in Ireland at the best of times. Wouldn't feed a snipe! Tell me now, what are you going to do?"

"Perhaps you'll tell me that. I don't know—we can't run the paper on nothing."

"Indeed, 'tis a great problem running things on nothing; I've been trying it all me life, an' only I'm lucky—why, I've lived for years on accidents. Yes. I've been terribly lucky with accidents!"

"With accidents?"

"To be sure. Did I never tell you? A friend of mine, whin I came in for a little money at the death of an aunt, advised me to insure against accidents. Faith, 'twas the best bit of advice that ever I got in me life! It kept me going for years and years—with economy."

"How was that?" asked Hazlitt.

"Well, I hadn't paid more than two instalments of that insurance, when I fell downstairs and broke me left leg. I was lying on me back for two months, drawing ten pounds a week, and it was four months before I was convalescent. I made a pile out of them that time. Then, shortly after I got better of that, I broke me right arm."

"They must have thought you very brittle," said Hazlitt.

"So they did, you bet, before they had done with me! Wun after another I broke everything that was breakable, and not fatal. In the end, they wouldn't insure me at iny price, and I can't blame them. 'Tis too lucky I was altogether. Faith, sir! I made by it—yes, made a heap by it, and

here I am to-day, not a farthing the worse, sound in wind and limb as you see, barring walking with a slight halt."

"I should say your kind of luck was unique," said Jack. "You can hardly counsel other people to follow your example, for their fractures might not be as neat as yours."

"That's so. It might be dangerous. Indeed, I hope I may break nothing more meself, for there is nothing left except me neck, and that's precious. Good people are scarce, and the bad must take care of themselves. Besides, these accidents frighten me old lady. She's getting nervous."

"Who do you call your old lady?" asked Otto. "Your wife?"

"Wife indeed! Not she. A wife is a luxury I was never able to afford. It's me mother I mean. Seventy-four years of age next September, sir, and as straight as an arrow still. Begad, I'm proud of her. But to come back to y'r paper. I'm interested in it, since it is a source of income that is threatened. Can't we hit on something between us to help a lame dog over the stile?"

"Perhaps, but what?" said Jack.

"Have you tried an Insurance Coupon?"

"In order that you may buy a copy and commit suicide, leaving a thousand pounds to your heirs? No thank you, MacCarthy. It's not good enough!"

"Sure I wasn't thinking of meself," said MacCarthy with a jolly laugh; "only all the papers do be doing things of the kind nowadays, and I thought there must be advantages in it to the editor."

"What we want is a boom," said Hazlitt reflectively. "Something to make people talk about the paper, and read it, for we are both persuaded that if they once do read it they will like it."

"Yes, I stand by that," said Darracott. "It's honest value, and so the public would find out if they would try it. We have now to bait a trap to catch the public. How shall we do that?"

"I should say," said MacCarthy, "the best thing was by hook or by crook to set the women talking."

"I daresay. But how is it to be done?"

"What about an original prize competition?" said Hazlitt.

"Something appealing chiefly to women?" asked Darracott.

"Exclusively to women, if you like."

"By all means. But how hit on a good one? The thing has been so terribly overdone."

"Let us think," said Otto Hazlitt. "What do women most want? What are they most interested in? What do they most desire?"

"Faith, I should say what a woman most wants is a good husband," said MacCarthy with his infectious laugh.

"Eureka! Bravo, bravo! A capital idea. Let us offer as a prize a good husband!" cried Hazlitt. "That will fetch them. Give me a bit of paper and I'll put it down."

"Don't talk nonsense," said Jack.

"Darracott, you're a regular John Bull. There is nothing of which you fight so shy as of a new idea," said the Count.

"Count," said Hazlitt, "don't mind that man.

We owe you everlasting gratitude for your suggestion. I, at least, am thankful. It has set us on the right track. I no longer despair of finding a satisfactory solution of our difficulties."

"Faith, I'm glad to hear it," said the Count. "I don't pretend to be disinterested. Sure *The Comet* stood to me ever since it came into Darracott's hands, and I'd like to stand to it. If it goes under, I'll go too."

"We're all in the same boat," said Hazlitt, "and it won't be my fault if the paper doesn't float."

"You're not likely to float it by providing husbands for the million," cried Jack.

"Am I not?" retorted Hazlitt. "Just you wait till you see. By Jove! Darracott, you may be all right as a literary man, but you haven't an ounce of journalistic enterprise. You depend on good English, I depend on a lucky fluke. Stick to your books and let me run the paper. All you'll have to do then is to pocket the cash."

"Well," said the Count, "good luck to you both, and may you evolve some scheme that will keep our heads above water."

"It sounds like a toast," said Hazlitt.

"So it does," replied the Count, "and unfortunately I haven't a pennyworth of inything, barring the water, to drink it in—more's the pity."

Darracott played moodily with a paper-knife, while Hazlitt sat with his head buried in his hands.

"Well," said Jack at length, "why don't you speak?"

"Don't bother me, old boy; I'm thinking it out."

"Still that absurd idea! You're not serious."

"Not serious," echoed Hazlitt hotly. "It is the germ of a fortune. I know a good thing when I see it, if you do not. The Count has hit the nail on the head. Of course we want to be talked about, of course it is the women who talk, and of course the best way to set them talking is to offer them something they want. We'll offer the biggest prize on earth—a good husband."

"What woman would care to get a husband in such a way?"

"Wouldn't she just, if nobody knew it! What woman would fail to talk about it anyhow, if only to condemn it? But we must work up the idea. Real goodness in a man is not sufficient to draw the crowd."

"It ought to be, for it's rare enough."

"Shut up, old chap. We must find some more irresistible bait."

"But what?"

"How do I know—rank, riches? Why not all of them? By George! I begin to see my way. Let us have flaming posters all over England, all over the world, announcing the scheme."

"Impossible!"

"Impossible, nonsense. Why should it be impossible?"

"Oh, it's absurd on the face of it. Where on earth are we to get the husband, and the rank, and the riches? How can we offer them when we haven't sixpence to our credit? The thing would simply be a swindle."

"A swindle! I like that! Wait till I've worked

it out, and then see whether it will be a swindle or not."

"But anyhow, will it be legal? Lotteries are forbidden by law," said Jack.

"Oh, don't make difficulties," cried Otto. "We needn't call it a lottery, and then it will take the authorities a month or two to find out about it; or we can put in some conditions that will bring it within safe bounds. I'll consult Brown and Gray. Anyhow I'm for taking chances. If we get a big ad. it is all we want."

"But even if it's safe, won't it be rather . . . rather *infra dig.* of *The Comet* to take up a thing of the kind?"

"Jack," said Hazlitt, "don't be so beastly superior. Are you, or are you not in difficulties?"

"You know very well that I am."

"Have you, or have you not good reasons for being anxious to get out of them, and show a balance on the right side?"

"Of course. Still——"

"No objections, please, till I've finished. Did you, or did you not request us just now to suggest some means of helping you out?"

"I did, but——"

"Respected Chief, but me no buts. We have found the means and you turn up your nose! Is this fair? Is this wise? Is this right?"

"Oh, it would be playing things too low down."

"See here, old man. Leave it in my hands to run as I like. You're a sight too dignified, and literary, and all that. I tell you, there's money in it. Isn't that what you want?"

"Yes, but the character of the paper——"

"More buts! What's the matter with the character of the paper? We'll play a fair game. You've admitted that what we want is a boom. Here is a boom. What we want is to make people talk of the paper. This will make 'em talk! What we want is to get them to read it. This will make 'em read it. Your views are met at every point, and still, like Mélisande, you are not happy."

"I don't want a boom of this kind," urged Jack.

"No, you want a gilt-edged boom of your own, and the public aren't taking any. Listen to me, Darracott. What does it matter so long as the thing is square? Who knows that you are mixed up with *The Comet*? Not a dozen people outside your own family. What does the big world outside Fleet Street know of newspaper editors and newspaper proprietors as such? especially when the paper is none too successful? Just nothing at all. You needn't appear in this unless you like. Sit still and rake in the shekels. Let me work; I've a gift for organisation."

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards, when you're a millionaire and the paper is a thundering success, the origin of that success will be forgotten in six months. It will not hamper you in any way in making a name on your own account later on, quite independently of *The Comet*. Believe me, there's a fortune in it. Think it over."

"But how is it to be managed?" said Jack after a few minutes' silence.

"How is it to be managed? Leave that to me. You bet I'll work it out somehow."

"But we have no money to spend on wild-cat schemes."

"By Jupiter! I have it! Let's have a competition with an entrance fee, say half a crown, five shillings, what you like. The cash will go to the Prize, the husband to the Prize Winner, the advertisement to the paper. Glorious!"

"I say!" cried the Count, "that sounds like good business, but will anyone compete?"

"Compete! I should just say so, if it's well worked up. There are tremendous possibilities in it. Promise not to publish their real names, and lots of girls will compete, if only for the fun of the thing. Look at the enormous number of spinsters in the British Islands! Suppose a quarter of a million enter—and what are they to the possible total?—it will mean at half a crown a head about thirty thousand pounds! Where is the woman who will despise a good husband and thirty thousand pounds—ay, or half of it?"

"Of course it doesn't. Of course it will be a big success."

"But the prize," said Jack. "How the mischief are we to secure the prize to start with?"

"That must be your business. You know everybody. Tell us what sprig of nobility will take chances. It may be a big thing, worth any man's while."

"I don't know one," said Jack after a few moments' reflection.

"But there must be lots who would jump at the prospect of a fortune."

"So there are, no doubt, if we'd take them on, but they're all bad lots."

"Um, that won't do. We must have no blackguards in this business."

"There you are," said Jack.

"Nonsense!" cried Otto. "Never say die! We'll get the right man somewhere. Rake your memory. If England fails, fish up a French Duke, or a Russian Prince, or an Italian Marquis, or a German Baron——"

"Or an Irish gentleman," said MacCarthy with a smile.

"Hooray!" cried Hazlitt, boisterously flinging up the ruler to the ceiling and catching it again. "You've hit it, the very thing."

"Hit it! How?"

"Why not an Irish gentleman? Why not an Irish Count? Why not our friend MacCarthy?"

"Is it I?" asked the Count hastily. "Faith, I wouldn't do it for the world. It's joking you are."

"Not I," replied Hazlitt. "I'm deadly serious. Why not you rather than another?"

"Couldn't possibly," cried the Count in alarm. "I'm not a marrying man."

"You'll soon get over that."

"Confound me for a fool!" exclaimed MacCarthy. "I'm sorry I spoke. D'ye think for a moment I meant that——?"

"I don't," interrupted Otto. "It was an inspiration. We mustn't rush this, Jack, it's too good. We must work up to it for weeks."

"But I tell you," said the Count, "I hadn't the remotest——"

"I know you hadn't, but you must," jerked Hazlitt. "You are the very man we want: is this what you call sticking to your friends?"

"I'd sooner stick to a gun. If it were only inything else in life I'd do it, so I would."

"But this is where we need you. Come, MacCarthy, don't be one of those damned good-natured chaps that will do anything for a fellow except just what he wants him to do. You mustn't desert us in a crisis like this. Two minutes ago you were all agog to find someone to do it. Why not do it yourself?"

"I wouldn't propose to a woman for a sackful of diamonds. 'Tis a regular old bachelor I am."

"Then this is your chance. The paper will make the proposal and smooth your path, and all you will have to do will be to walk over. It's high time for you to settle in life."

"No," said MacCarthy emphatically. "I won't do it. Think of me name in print. Why, everyone would make fun of me."

"Don't be bashful. Your name won't appear. We'll manage that. Just fix your mind on the fortune you may win. Won't that gild the pill? What do you say to forty thousand pounds as a nest-egg on which to start housekeeping?"

"Forty thousand pounds!" exclaimed the Count in astonishment.

"Perhaps more," urged Otto, pressing his advantage.

"Oh, nonsense, man alive! 'Twould never come to that. For—ty—thou—sand—pounds. Impossible!"

"Why impossible? If it comes to anything at all, it will come to something big, and if it doesn't, you will be no worse off than you are now."

"That's true," admitted the Count. "Forty thousand pounds! The quarter of it would make me happy. Faith, it's tempting. There's no denying that."

"Of course."

"'Twould be grand," said the Count with a sigh. "But no, faith, Hazlitt. The risk is too great. I'd jump at it if it weren't for the girrl."

"But it's just the girl you ought to jump at. What's wrong with the girl?"

"She mayn't be the sort of girrl I like."

"But she will be," asserted Hazlitt confidently. "I know it. I feel it. Why look on the gloomy side? She will be charming."

"If you're so sure of it," said MacCarthy, "why don't you go in for her yourself?"

"I would like a shot," said Otto, "but I'd stand no chance. You forget the main thing. I've no title to offer her."

"'Tis a risk," repeated the Count meditatively, "a terrible risk. Faith, I never was alarmed before."

"After all, it's only another sort of accident, and it can't be more dangerous than some you've come through."

"That's the way to look at it," said Jack, smiling. "Just think of the advantages the competition offers you. Think of riches and beauty at your command."

"No doubt it would be great," admitted the

Count. "That is, of course, if it turned out all right."

"It's a man's sacred duty to marry, and here's your chance," cried Otto.

"A real prize the pretty creature that won me would find me," said MacCarthy, "that is, if I liked her."

"Of course she would. You'd make her an excellent husband."

"But I can't make up me mind to it. I'm too shy, so I am."

"It is always shy men that do desperate deeds," said Jack.

"Oh, I'm not shy enough to be desperate."

"Come," said Hazlitt, "I can see you're wavering. Throw in your lot with us."

"You really think I ought to marry?" asked the Count.

"Sure of it. Haven't I said so a dozen times? You'll never marry younger, that's certain."

"Perhaps you're right," said the Count with a sigh. "There's a deal of wisdom in you. A man wants someone to look after him when he's getting on in life."

"Of course he does," said Hazlitt.

"And for a man there's no one like a woman," said Jack.

"Except another woman," said Hazlitt.

"Cynic," cried the Count. "But the title?"

"What about the title?" asked Hazlitt. "It's hereditary and all that, isn't it?"

"To be sure it is," said the Count. "It's hereditary and all right, if it only had money to

back it. I have the letters patent at home. But maybe she'll want something bigger."

"Let her want," exclaimed Otto cavalierly. "I'd like to know what more she expects for half a crown. It's the greatest bargain ever offered. You're going at a sacrifice, Count, and we'll have half the women in the world competing for you. Shake hands, old man. That fortune's as good as made."

CHAPTER III

THE COMET'S TALE

NOT long after the conversation recounted in our last chapter, all London one day broke forth into a blaze of coloured posters—

READ *THE COMET*
A UNIQUE OFFER
THE BIGGEST PRIZE ON EARTH
LADIES, LOOK OUT FOR *THE COMET*.

So ran the first batch of announcements that flared on every dead wall, and illumined the semi-darkness of every underground railway station.

For weeks articles appeared in the paper, leading up to a climax, promising something wonderful, mysterious, hitherto unheard of, betokening colossal enterprise on the part of the proprietors, of the deepest personal interest to every unmarried woman throughout the world, and so on.

Expectation was at its height by the time the final article was printed, and with it a fresh set of posters—

TO UNMARRIED LADIES ONLY
SPINSTERS AND WIDOWS—THIS IS YOUR CHANCE
THE BIGGEST PRIZE ON EARTH
A HUSBAND—A FORTUNE—AND A TITLE
SEE THIS WEEK'S *COMET*.

The announcement came at a dull moment, when the press was glad to seize on anything that gave an excuse for a lively leader or a pert paragraph. Such a departure from the traditions of an old-established paper like *The Comet* was a novelty on which journalists in search of copy were delighted to enlarge. It was commented on in every news-sheet from Land's End to John-o'-Groats, and from Deal to Denver, and the comments were, as usual, contradictory. *The Comet* was told that it 'had met a long-felt want,' that it 'had embarked on a curious enterprise,' that 'every unmarried woman should send a postal order,' that 'no self-respecting woman would be seen reading it,' and many other things, according to the age, views, and temper of the writers, or according to the age, views, and temper of their female relations. America and the Colonies discussed the matter, thanks to Hazlitt, who was London correspondent for several papers. Jack and his associates were called philanthropists, sensation-mongers, humorists, speculators, but the result was that the world talked, and the name of the paper was speedily in the mouths of people who had never heard of it before.

Everyone bought *The Comet*. People wished to see what all the fuss was about, and became interested in the development of the scheme. Husbands brought each number home to their wives, who might have been expected to take no interest in the matter. Readers speculated whether the offer could possibly be genuine.

The Comet was the topic of conversation at every dinner-table, suburban or Belgravian.

"Have you seen those 'queer,' or 'ridiculous,' or 'amusing,' or 'absurd,' or 'wonderful' advertisements of *The Comet*?" became the favourite method of breaking the ice, when a man took down a strange lady. It opened up a wide field for discussion. How was the Prize to be won? Granted the thing was not a fraud, who could the Prize possibly be? Did anyone know him? Could anyone guess his identity? Would any woman enter the competition, and if so, women of what class? The state of the marriage market, the relative proportion of men to women in the British Islands, the ethics of journalism, and many kindred subjects were broached as a matter of course.

Engaged young ladies remarked with an air of pride that fortunately they had no need to compete. Disengaged young ladies wondered how any of their sex could be found to compete; widows speculated as to whether the competition would be fairly conducted, and as to what rank the winner would attain. She could not be less than 'My lady'—that was certain. They said it really was very amusing, and that they'd like to try, just for the fun of the thing. Of course the winner could not be compelled to marry the man unless she liked—and, after all, he might be quite a nice man. The things that newspapers did nowadays were past belief, but this certainly was very enterprising. How romantic it would be to win wealth, a title, and a husband at a stroke, just by drawing a lucky number! The radical papers abused the

aristocrat who, with cynical disregard for the obligations of his rank, offered himself for competition. No doubt he was some battered *roué* bought by the gold of an enterprising journalist. The American press in part thanked Providence that in a democratic country such a scandal was impossible. The other part referred to the action as a good joke, and recommended their fair countrywomen to try their luck, endeavour to pull off the event, as American girls had succeeded in so many other fields. Whether they blessed or banned, all journals mentioned it, and this was just what Otto Hazlitt desired.

Every woman in Great Britain bought the issue of *The Comet* containing full particulars of the Matrimonial Lottery. It was simple enough. Competitors were to send in a coupon cut from the paper, retaining the duplicate. Each was, at the same time, to send a postal order for half a crown, and to give in her own handwriting a real or assumed name, and an address at which communications would find her. A grand prize-drawing was promised at a certain date to be hereafter announced. The strictest fairness was guaranteed, and the Prize Winner would be immediately communicated with. She would be at liberty to reject the Prize if she did not find him to her taste, when her half-crown would be returned. On the other hand, the Prize would not be at liberty to reject her, except on condition of making adequate compensation. Ladies might compete as many times as they chose, provided that each coupon was accompanied by the required

postal order. No invalids were eligible, but the only other conditions made were that competitors should be women of unblemished reputation, of fair education, and under forty. A delightful pen-portrait of MacCarthy followed. His height, his muscular development, his good looks, his ancient family, his cheerful disposition, his prowess in the hunting-field, his accomplishments, his life of adventure in many lands, his soldiering, were all described in glowing terms. Finally, the important fact was announced that in addition to personal graces and charms, combined with moral worth, he would be able to bestow upon the fortunate Prize Winner the honourable title of Countess.

The composition of this masterpiece, the joint production of Otto and MacCarthy himself, was the occasion for peals of mirth at the office of *The Comet*. Business was looking up, and it was already a gayer place than it had been. Jack assisted, and suggested occasional happy phrases.

"The point is," said Otto, waving his pen, "to make it attractive and to make it convincing. Every woman who reads it must feel that it is the very thing for her. We must inspire confidence. The faintest suspicion of anything catch-penny or doubtful in the business will ruin us. Now I flatter myself I have a gift for writing the exact sort of preliminary notice that is needed, and if I do write with my tongue in my cheek, at least no one will be able to suspect the fact. This, gentlemen, is the secret of a great and popular success, gush—but not too much gush—a command of

judicious emotionalism. I will paint the loneliness of the spinster and the widow in language that will draw tears, and, what is more, I will do away with every idea of the ridiculous as associated with this competition, and make women feel that to enter for it is not only natural but laudable."

Now that the Count had definitely consented to act as Prize, he entered into the matter with much interest and enthusiasm. His fears, thanks to Otto's eloquence, had been largely dissipated, his hopeful disposition asserted itself, and he felt assured that the issue of the enterprise would be of the happiest nature.

MacCarthy it was who insisted on asserting the item about his looks. Otto had written down details as to his inches and his affectionate disposition, when the Count interfered.

"Make it stronger, me boy. Hang it all! you may as well say a good word for me when y'r hand is in. Make it enticing," said MacCarthy with a twinkle. "Now that I'm down for the thing I'll put me best foot foremost."

"But, Count," said Otto, "I don't want to deceive the poor girls more than we can help."

"By George! Mac," said Jack, "you're no beauty."

"'Tis me belief you're jealous," said MacCarthy calmly. "Good judges think me better looking than yourself, and if me face is not strictly beautiful, see me figure! Where will you be, inyhow, if there's no competition for me? An', begad, if you want to fetch the women you must mention me looks. 'Tis business, me boy, 'tis business. Be-

sides, as you pointed out, no one will know who I am except the Prize Winner, and the pretty dear needn't take me if she doesn't like me."

Accordingly the article stated that the Prize was handsome, with piercing eyes, a fine moustache, and a striking presence.

"Let us say 'a nobleman of ancient lineage,'" suggested Otto. "Yours is an old family, isn't it, Count?"

"To be sure," said MacCarthy; "as old as the hills. Why, there were MacCarthys in Ireland before the Flood, and as for the de Burgos, they run a good second. After all, though I'm poor, what are your mushroom English lords that rise like the froth on their own beer, or your Charles the Second dukes, to a man who can go back to Charlemagne and Conn of the Hundred Battles?"

"Conn lost most of those battles, didn't he?" asked Jack slyly.

"That's not the point," said the Count. "He fought them all inyhow, like a man!"

"Give me a list of your accomplishments, quick," cried Otto, after a pause filled by the rapid scratching of his pen.

"Accomplishments," repeated MacCarthy doubtfully. "Why, I have no accomplishments."

"Nonsense! You ride, and fence, and shoot, and all that, don't you?"

"Oh, of course. But I don't call them accomplishments. They're just what every man can do."

"Are they indeed? Come, come. You're much more modest about these than about your looks."

"Well, you see, looks are a question of taste, but now we're coming to facts. I wouldn't say anything about accomplishments if I were you."

"But I will. You told me just now to make it enticing. What about riding?"

"Of course I can ride a bit, and no thanks to me. I had a pony as soon as I could walk."

"You fence like an Italian," said Jack, "I've seen you."

"Oh, there's nothing in that. You think something of it only because fencing isn't so common in England."

"Then, Mac, you're a dead shot."

"Pretty decent as to that. Me old Dad used to make us snuff candles."

"Do you dance?"

"Not since I broke my second leg. Say nothing about dancing, I've got beyond that."

"You talk French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese."

"Better a sight than I do English, and why wouldn't I, seeing how long I've lived abroad?—but say nothing about the languages or they'll think I'm a foreigner."

"I have said already that you are not a foreigner," said Otto.

"Oh, that's all right then," said MacCarthy, "so long as they know I'm not a Parlez-vous, and like me morning tub."

"Do you play any instrument?"

"Not I—barring the Jew's harp. I can thrum a little on the guitar, to be sure, but we'll not mention that."

"We must certainly put in the guitar, it sounds romantic. Anything else?"

"I can't remember. You're making too much of those things. They're not worth writing down."

"But you swim like a fish, Mac," said Jack. "I've not forgotten how gallantly you saved that fellow's life at Kingstown."

The Count blushed.

"A trifle," he said, "don't mind that."

"And then you're so good at games—golf, billiards, cards, chess, and all that."

"Fair to middling. What's the good of games?"

"Why, we have to corkscrew this out of you, and put leading questions, whereas when it had to do with your looks, or your family, you were ready enough."

"Oh, as to looks, that is just fun, but as to the family—family, to me mind, is more to be proud of than things you just pick up. A fellow can't acquire it, while iny low blackguard can learn to fence, or to swim, or to ride, or play games. We see that every day."

"By George!" said Otto, "family without money or influence counts for little nowadays."

"That's true," said the Count, "and that's why a poor devil that's down in his luck is forced to insist on his family just to keep his courage up. Money speaks for itself."

"You're a queer mixture! Still, the description makes very good reading."

"So it does. I hope the pretty dear won't be too much disappointed when she sees the original.

I'll have to be very nice to her to make up for deficiencies."

"As I told you before," remarked Hazlitt, "you'll be cheap at half a crown, anyhow, and then she may not be a pretty dear at all."

"Well, you are a kill-joy," said the Count. "Why shouldn't she? There are lots of nice girrls going, as you said yourself. You swore the other day she'd be a beauty. Faith, if she's a fright I'll cheat."

"She won't be a fright," said Jack consolingly. "Otto's only chaffing; and anyhow, MacCarthy, you have the solid consolation of knowing that subscriptions are already coming in."

CHAPTER IV

INTRODUCES MR. AND MRS. GOLIGHTLY CARTER

MRS. GOLIGHTLY CARTER was 'At Home.' She had summoned her friends to meet a celebrity, Mr. Claude Scarlette, whose volume of poetry, *Eros and the Duchess*, a Philistine jury had declared to be prejudicial to public morals.

Mrs. Golightly Carter belonged to that numerous class of aspiring London hostesses who, failing to be aristocratic, aim at being entertaining. To qualify as a leader in her particular set, Mrs. Golightly Carter had herself written a novel, *The Vengeance of Vashti Vere*, of which eighty copies sold. The book was crammed with sensation and sentiment, but her friends found it disappointingly proper. While scarcely a lion-hunter, real lions being too rare in her circle, she gathered round her a crowd of persons with literary or artistic aspirations, and made it a *sine quâ non* that her acquaintances should be 'interesting.' As the word has a wide signification, her guests were people who had distinguished themselves in vastly different ways, and who were often astonished to find themselves in each other's company.

Admission to Mrs. Golightly Carter's 'At Homes'

was eminently desirable for persons anxious to make acquaintances. She had herself met most of those who frequented the various clubs and societies to which she belonged. She took fancies to the possessors of handsome faces or pleasant manners, and became their social godmother. Under her wing they were brought in contact with all sorts and conditions of men—and women; fools and knaves, the speckled and the unspotted, rich and poor, a few real and many sham celebrities. The newest Faith Healer discoursed of Christian Science with the hysterical wife of the solid City man, while Baron Crystoleum, the famous seer and Bond Street palmist, sat in the corner holding the hand of her susceptible daughter, Miss Moneybagges. In the supper-room Mr. Gadabout, the famous traveller, talked about new gold mines with the Chevalier de l'Industrie, the famous International Company promoter; and Miss Pattie Lonsdale Beauchamp of the Music Hall stage (whose song, 'The Girl that Winked,' is so famous), presented to Lady de Tompkyns under her private name of Brown, charmed that august dowager by offering to help at her stall at the forthcoming church bazaar. Through the medium of her acquaintances one might be passed on indefinitely into circles much higher and much lower than the one actually occupied by Mrs. Golightly Carter herself.

Mr. Golightly Carter was the man who provided the money for Mrs. Golightly Carter's entertainments, though it amused that vivacious lady to speak at times as if she drew her funds from some less reputable source. Her husband's views she held to

be old-fashioned, and was ashamed of them. Mr. Golightly Carter was a prosperous City merchant, and biology was his hobby out of business hours. Many of his guests did not know him by sight, consequently he was more than once the recipient of confidences as to the hostess and the company that could scarcely have been pleasant to him in his capacity as host. A philosopher in his way, he humoured his pretty wife, despised her friends, and was generally too easy-going to interfere with her amusements. He adored their only child, a girl of eighteen, who had been educated at a convent abroad, and had recently left school. On her behalf alone did he rouse himself to action.

On the present occasion Mr. and Mrs. Golightly Carter were standing in their drawing-room awaiting guests. She was a pretty woman, plump, with a fair complexion and golden hair. She fitted tightly into her pale green satin gown, with its low-cut bodice. Her eyes were darkened, her lips painted carmine. Though really an excellent creature, she had adopted many of the outward visible signs that once marked off women of the half-world from women of the world. Her diamonds were magnificent.

"What can be keeping Maisie?" she said impatiently to her husband. "I wish you'd see what she is doing. She ought to have been dressed long ago."

"Oh, Maisie's all right," replied Mr. Golightly Carter, "she's torn some lace on her frock and Pinner is mending it. She will be down time enough."

He was a man of fifty-five, with a strong, clean-cut face, and something of a lawyer's keen expression, counteracted by the tenderness, amounting almost to weakness, of the mouth, and an indolent manner.

"But people have begun to come already. I'm sure I hear Mrs. de Prazza's voice in the hall."

"Mrs. de Prazza! Who the deuce is she?"

"Oh, you remember her—the tall, handsome, dark woman—rather Jewish-looking, you know—who always dresses in orange. She was introduced to me by the Pattersons."

"My dear, I never remember your friends; you have too many."

"Oh, but you do, Lester, you must. She used to be Mrs. Schliemann, and now she is married to de Prazza, the rich Portuguese."

"You don't mean the woman who was mixed up in the disgraceful Schliemann scandal?"

"The very same. Such a splendid-looking creature."

"And you have asked her here?"

"Why not, poor thing? She was quite right to run away from that horrid Schliemann, and now de Prazza has married her, so it's all right."

"'All right' do you call it? Well, upon my word, Letty, I'd like to know what my poor mother—or yours—would have said if she were asked to meet her."

"My dear Lester, you have such old-world notions. You have no feeling for the poor creature. What could she do? Schliemann was absolutely intolerable."

"So he was, and she knew that when she married him. If she hadn't, I'd have every sympathy with her, but she did. She's pretty shrewd, and if she made her bargain open-eyed, by George! I think she ought to have stuck to it. Why, she swindled the man right and left."

"I don't believe a word of it. The world is always so down on people."

"To ensure your sympathy, my dear, it is only necessary to have kicked over the traces in any direction. You adore scapegraces."

"Really, Lester, you are ridiculous. I saw you were in one of your black moods when you came in."

"Because I had just heard that your charming Mr. Scarlette was to be here."

"Well, and what of that? He is a man of the highest family——"

"And the lowest morals."

"— and goes everywhere," went on Mrs. Carter, unheeding; "while as for dear Mrs. de Prazza, that you're so hard on, she is a sweet creature, and so amusing."

"Yes, I've heard her stories."

"Oh, you are horrid! Since when have you taken this fit of propriety?"

"Quite lately, I'm afraid. It's a pity I didn't take it sooner. If it were not for my cursed laziness, and hatred of interfering, and natural desire to have an easy life and let things slide, I'd have turned proper to some purpose long ago. It didn't appear to matter, somehow, when Maisie was only a child, and it amused you. We seemed to have years and years before she would grow up; but now

I begin to see that it did matter a great deal, and that this is no place for a girl like her."

"No place for Maisie! All my friends are the nicest and kindest people, and how you can talk so harshly, just because poor dear Mrs. de Prazza has been unfortunate in her married life, I cannot understand."

"My dear Letty, there are many things you cannot understand."

"But, Lester, you yourself hate 'respectability.' You have said it so often, when I told you about Aunt Jane."

"If I hate 'respectability' in your Aunt Jane's sense, I don't hate what is worthy of respect. My dear Letty, though you are very pretty and very amiable, and are charming when you are indignant, you are not—pray forgive me—the wisest of women. You are for ever trying to re-habilitate people who do not deserve to be re-habilitated; but to balance this I find you are invariably ready to credit the report of any villainy on the part of the virtuous."

"I don't believe in the people who set up for being so much better than their neighbours. They are frauds."

"Not invariably. Goodness is not hypocrisy, but your friends always resent a standard higher than their own."

"One would think we were living in some small provincial town. How should you know anything against these persons if you did not listen to miserable petty gossip?"

"Can one avoid hearing it? Is it not thrust on one? And who carries it?"

"Horrid cats, I suppose," said Mrs. Carter.

"Precisely, but who are these cats? Formerly the straitlaced matron was privileged to talk scandal. In right of her rigid standard of morality she was supposed to find fault with her less perfect sisters and discuss their failings. The woman 'no better than she should be,' on the other hand, was supposed to be good-natured and tolerant, remembering the proverb about people in glass houses. We have changed all that now, and the light women of to-day combine the disagreeable attributes of the moralists with their own particular vices. They like to make out that everyone is tarred with the same brush."

Mrs. Golightly Carter laughed rather uneasily. "My dear Lester," she said, "I am just as careful of Maisie, and as fond of her as you are. But don't you think it is rather late in the day to talk to me in this strain? It doesn't take me in. I know you too well, and there's no use in your pretending to be a saint."

"There you hit me," said her husband gravely. "I am no saint, as you say. The point is, I respect what is good in Maisie, and I want if possible to keep her as she is now. I have known of discussions in this room which I should be sorry to think she had heard."

"Stuff! Maisie's far too innocent for her age. She should learn to know the world."

"Leave her alone. To know the world means to know how bad it is. Keep her young and innocent if you can. She will be old, and wise, and sad time enough."

"But she has so little 'go' in her: and as for the mildest flirtation, apparently she despises it. She talks to young men in the most matter-of-fact way, as if she were their mother, or their elder sister. She'll never get married if she goes on like that."

"There's not a man comes to this house that's fit to tie her shoe-string, except perhaps——"

"Except who——?"

"Oh, no matter. But as for her not getting married, I'm greatly mistaken if she won't. Even if she doesn't, what is the odds? I'd sooner see her single all her life than married to some of your friends."

"Nice way she snubbed poor Bertie Croft when he asked her."

Mr. Carter sighed and turned away. Arguing with his wife was futile, and he knew it, even while he argued.

At this moment the door was thrown open, and a servant pompously announced the first guest of the evening.

"Miss Arethusa Jenkins!"

CHAPTER V

MRS. GOLIGHTLY CARTER'S GUESTS, INCLUDING SOME PROSPECTIVE COMPETITORS

MISS ARETHUSA JENKINS was an eager-faced, restless woman of determined aspect. Her short, slight figure gave her at first sight a deceptive air of youth. She had a sallow complexion, a snub nose, high cheek-bones, a long, obstinate chin, pale light eyes, and a wide, voluble mouth, full of large teeth that were inclined to project, so that her face was unpleasingly suggestive of a death's head. Miss Jenkins was one of those persons who, without being much uglier than their neighbours, are 'queer'-looking. She was attired in some transparent black stuff over coloured cotton. On her forehead she had bound a star in Parisian diamonds. The black elastic fastening was but imperfectly concealed. As she secured this ornament before her glass, Miss Jenkins, who lived in a world of fantastic imaginings, pictured herself entering Mrs. Carter's drawing-room like the young Diana, crescent-crowned. Like Diana, indeed, Miss Jenkins was a maiden, like Diana she was a huntress, but she was an elderly maiden, and as a huntress her sole quarry was man. In

common with other friends of Mrs. Carter, she had 'views.' Hers, however, were dissolving views, but with a permanent basis. She had a steadfast and unchangeable resolve, a fixed determination. To this end she went slumming, catechising, and canvassing; wrote circulars, addressed envelopes; worked herself to death in this cause or that; suffered from doubts, drifted to agnosticism, returned to Christianity; was alternately a socialist and a high Conservative, joined political, altruistic, or ethical societies, and left them — all in vain.

In the tragi-comedy of life, one of the saddest things is that creatures whom Nature and Society alike would seem to have destined to remain single, should so often have a piteous desire to change their condition. Compassion for Miss Jenkins does not, however, permit us to deny that she was dangerous—at least to unoffending persons of the male sex.

Mrs. Carter had met her in the course of a political campaign, and being impressed by her lofty manner, had asked her to call. Miss Jenkins liked the house and the people she met there so well that she never missed one of the lady's 'At Homes.'

After her advent, the rooms began to fill. Mrs. de Prazza was the next to arrive, in flame-colour, with flame-coloured flowers stuck curiously in her dark hair.

"Here comes the Babylonian lady," muttered Mr. Carter as she entered.

She looked like a Bacchante, and had brought

with her five men who followed her from room to room. To these, none of whom was previously known to Mrs. Carter, she spoke in loud tones with much laughter and many gestures. When one or other wandered from her side, she raised herself on tiptoe to see over the heads of the guests, and called the deserter by his Christian name, beckoning to him at the same time with exaggerated emphasis. If he chanced to be talking to a pretty girl, and seemed to be enjoying himself, as sometimes happened, he made excuses with a sheepish air, and returned somewhat sulkily to the fold.

Miss Skuse, the astrologer and palmist, wearing a gold necklet having weird cabalistic pendants, and with her grey hair brushed straight up, came accompanied by Mr. Spode, a stout man with a full beard flecked with grey, and an impediment in his speech. A popular authoress of mature charms, in white satin and diamonds, a long-haired poet, a little Jew with curly locks that stood out round his head like an aureole, a French novelist, whose books were broader than they were long, and an actress, her eyes painted till she looked like a frightened fawn, and guarded by a shrivelled mother, arrived in rapid succession. Next came Mrs. Porter, a lady who had the finest house at Hampstead, and issued invitations for her First Fridays to everyone whose name was in the Court Guide, whether she knew them or not. Many accepted, for champagne flowed like water, and strangers hobnobbed in a delightfully casual fashion, asking each other in whispers 'Who the devil is Mrs. Porter?'

There were several foreigners, a little Burmese, an Indian prince and his two attendants, a Parsee, a negro gentleman, a member of the Siamese Legation in native costume, and a Japanese student. Mrs. Golightly Carter's guests were always cosmopolitan, and often coloured.

Claude Scarlette, the poet, arrived rather late, but was civil and charming when he did come, to Mrs. Carter's secret relief. He had never been to her house before, and in the days when he had not yet been threatened with Holloway he had had the name of being critical, sarcastic, and exclusive, and of graduating his manners to his company in a fashion that pre-eminently distinguishes a certain type of British aristocrat, who, knowing that politeness is scarce in his country, does not often waste it on inferiors. Fewer drawing-rooms were now open to Mr. Scarlette, so he made himself delightful, and as a celebrity, even a slightly-damaged celebrity, was welcome to Mrs. Carter's friends. He was soon the centre of an admiring crowd.

Into this motley assembly walked Mr. Jack Darracott about half-past eleven. He had regularly received a card for Mrs. Carter's receptions, and as regularly ignored it, until Maisie Carter returned from school. They met one afternoon at an assembly, and from that time Jack became a frequent guest at Cleveland Square. Maisie's freshness, her simplicity, common-sense, and intelligence impressed him; for she was very pretty, and good looks in the case of a young woman draw attention to good qualities that without them pass unnoticed. One thing

every man understands at once, be he clever or stupid—namely, that a girl has a fine figure and a clear complexion; moral beauty he may discover later. Perhaps Maisie's chief charm lay in her exquisite, unconscious air of modesty and purity. She looked the embodiment of youth and innocence, so that older men and women watched her sometimes half sadly, wondering how long she would retain this crowning grace. Moreover, when her mother did not find fault with her, she had a natural and spontaneous gaiety, such as is common to all young creatures while they still believe that life must inevitably go well with them, before they have learnt the habit of sadness, before the shadow of constant apprehension that follows most lives has fallen on them.

How Mrs. Carter came to have such a daughter was a perpetual wonder to Jack. Mrs. Carter, more than any respectable woman he knew, seemed to have had the bloom rubbed off her. True, she was, as he phrased it, 'Not half a bad sort,' and Maisie had inherited her mother's sweet temper, but Darracott had seen a good deal of the world, and was not sufficiently youthful to like 'knowingness.' He was sick of the cheap society epitomised in Mrs. Carter's receptions, a society where the young were without innocence, and the old were without kindliness. Like Mr. Carter, he wished the girl were out of a circle with which she had so little in common.

Darracott was not a model young man. He had a quick temper and strong passions, but he came of gentle birth and was fastidious, so

was a somewhat cynical observer of his fellow-guests.

Mrs. Carter greeted him effusively, and then passed on to the next comer, after her fashion. She was a woman who gave parties entirely for her own entertainment. When she had provided her guests with music and refreshments she thought she had done for them all that anyone could reasonably expect, and for the rest left them to their own devices, which in many cases resulted in their talking to whatever friend or relation they had come with. Presently she bore down on Mr. Darracott to introduce him by request to Mrs. Shortland Dobbs, a wealthy widow from the States, who wore diamonds so big that everyone thought they were glass. Mrs. Shortland Dobbs—if anyone called her 'Dobbs' she urged '"Shortland" please' in a tone almost agonised—was rather attractive. She was a pretty little woman, and dressed the part. She had a somewhat harsh voice,—had but recently arrived in London, and was exceedingly anxious to make eligible acquaintances. A certain Mrs. Coates whom she had met on board the Atlantic liner was staying at the same hotel, and had brought her here.

"I was real glad to come," she told Jack confidentially, "for I did feel lonesome and discouraged. It was lucky I happened in here to-night, for I was as near as possible going to the the-ayter instead, an' then I shouldn't have met all the remarkable men and women of the day. Mrs. Coates, she intro-duced me to Lord Adolphus Bennell, and he was just lovely to me—too sweet for words.

He talked away like any other man. Say now, Mr. Darracott, are all lords like that ? "

" Most of them," replied Jack, " are very unlike Lord Adolphus."

" I reckon the others wear coronets and robes," said Mrs. Dobbs, " but that's just why I like Lord Adolphus. He does not make me feel the lash of caste, and he might, so far as appearance goes, be a plain citizen of the U-nited States."

" It is not in costume that Lord Adolphus differs from other people."

" I guess you don't like him," said Mrs. Dobbs acutely, " but I s'ppose naow that's just human nature. It is vurry hard on a man to be a plain 'Mister' when there are others 'raound with handles to their names, and they no better looking."

" I assure you," said Jack, smiling, " that makes no difference to me. I consider myself quite his equal."

" Do you so ? I never shall learn to understand your British ideas. I s'ppose that's because you air second cousin to an earl. Mrs. Carter, she told me. How *is* your noble relative ? "

" Very well, thank you," said Jack. The little bird-like woman amused him, her ignorance was so naïve. He found her at once smart, shrewd, kind-hearted, credulous, and sceptical. She was ready to swallow any nonsense about royalty or the peerage, but was not to be imposed upon where she knew her ground.

" Was you ever in the States, Mr. Darracott ? "

"Never, but I have been in Canada and in Mexico."

"Then, sir, you have much to see. The U-nited States is the land of liberty. There you will find none of these effete distinctions between man and man that prevail in Eu-rope. There we air all free and equal."

"Indeed!" said Jack. "I understood that in America, too, you had social distinctions."

"No, sir. In Amurrica such things do not exist. In Amurrica one man can say to another 'I am as good as you!'"

"People seem to keep on saying that in all democratic countries," remarked Jack; "but I never yet heard anyone say, 'You are as good as I,' and it seems to me true democracy lies in that attitude rather than the other."

"You must visit the States, sir, to understand true democracy."

"A friend of mine, Count MacCarthy de Burgo, who has lived there a great deal, tells me that in no country does the possession or the lack of money make so much difference."

"Money, sir, is essential to having a good time anywhere. In which part of the States did your friend the Count *re*side?"

"In most parts, I believe, but I know he spent some years in Iowa."

"Did he naow?" cried Mrs. Dobbs, in great delight. "Why, sir, I come from right there. I was raised in Ioway, and my fam'ly lived there 'way back in the seventies, but when I married I moved East to Shapira City, Noo York State,

where I am at present lo-cated. It would be real inter-rusting to meet your noble friend and converse with him. Here is my card. I am boarding, as you perceive, at the Hotel Ceecil, and if you will call any evening you like, and bring the Count with you, I shall endeavour to entertain you for *a* spell. I am not accustomed, sir, to frequent the society of titled persons, and if there air any formalities to be observed in the reception of your friend, it will gratify me if you make me acquainted with them beforehand."

"Please receive him just as if he were an American," said Jack amusedly. "It would embarrass him dreadfully if you didn't."

"I am relieved," observed Mrs. Dobbs. "If I had to walk backwards in his presence I don't calc'late I could manage to keep it up, but if it's quite c'rrect to treat him like an Amurrican, I guess I'll manage."

Just then came up Mrs. Coates, one of a type Darracott detested, her hair dyed—so many of Mrs. Carter's friends dyed their hair—her complexion removable, her skin puffy, her eyes, which were large and prominent, with fulness beneath them, deeply underscored by black lines that scarcely made believe to be eye-lashes. She looked like a poster, or an impressionist painting seen at close quarters. Having an acknowledged weakness for good-looking young men, Mrs. Coates tried to make herself very agreeable to Jack. She told him she was agitating for the abolition of marriage, and was to lecture on the subject at St. James's Hall.

"I hear," she said, "that you, sir, air a newspaper mahn. Naow I do so want to get the British public inter-rusted in my movement. The sorrow, sir, entailed on my sex by our present iniquitous system is intolerable. If you will come to hear me, I shall be only too happy to send you tickets for self and friend."

Jack murmured his acknowledgments.

"I fear," he said, "that as an unmarried man I may not fully appreciate the force of your arguments."

"Oh yes, you will," said Mrs. Coates. "They air most convincing. *The Detroit Eagle* says I speak with a force, fluency, and feeling that carry conviction to the most hardened upholder of present-time methods. Your paper, sir, should take cognisance of all movements, and ours is a vast one. It won't do to be left behind. I note with pleasure ever-ry time I come across the influence our Amurrican press is having in stirring up you Britishers."

"Indeed," said Jack.

"Why, certainly. A lady was telling me right here that one of your British papers, *The Comet*, was advertising an offer of a husband, a title and a fortune, to be competed for next month by its lady readers. Naow, sir, that is what I call real enterprising. They have learned a few things from us I guess."

"Sakes!" cried Mrs. Shortland Dobbs, "I call that just lovely. Do tell. Is it *a* genooine offer?"

Jack felt that he was blushing.

"I have reason to believe that it is," he said.

"Wa-al, now!" exclaimed Mrs. Shortland Dobbs, "that is the biggest and best thing I've heard since I came to this old country. It was *a* bright mahn started that idea! If they get wind of it in the States I reckon he'll make his pile."

"Guess I'll have a try," said Mrs. Coates.

"But I thought," said Jack, "you advocated the abolition of marriage?"

"So I do," said Mrs. Coates, "on gen'ral principles, but if the titled individual insisted on retaining the absurd formula that constitootes the marriage service, I might see haow far his wishes were compatible with my doctrines. It would be another vict'ry for Amurrica if a daughter of Columbia carried off one of your old nobility, and to patriotism private convictions should bow."

Darracott had not yet had a glimpse of Maisie. Entertainments were still new to her, and she felt shy amidst so many strangers. At the same time, as she was very kind-hearted, and felt that her mother's easy-going methods of entertaining scarcely conduced to the enjoyment of her guests, she was doing her best to supplement Mrs. Carter's negligence. She flitted from one person to another, talking to those who appeared bored or solitary, introducing those whom she found had tastes in common. Presently she passed Jack on the arm of a pale-faced, long-haired youth who played the 'cello, whom she was

about to present to a German girl violinist who talked loudly of her 'art.' She caught Mr. Darracott's eye. Her face brightened. She bowed and smiled. He glanced entreatingly at her, and with a scarcely perceptible flicker of his lashes towards Mrs. Coates, said under his breath, "Take me away."

She looked at his companion, and a mischievous smile dimpled the corners of her mouth, but presently she returned with a large, oleaginous person, having thin, curling hair, and a huge diamond stud, whom she presented to Mrs. Coates and Mrs. Shortland Dobbs as the Baron de Trouville. Mrs. Coates turned eagerly to the new-comer, and Jack released himself with a bow.

"For this relief much thanks," he whispered. "When I'm bored I always abuse the Royal family, and I was just about to begin when you came by."

"Is that your signal of distress?" laughed Maisie.

"Yes."

"It is to be hoped the people with whom you are conversing don't know it."

"Fortunately they don't," said Jack, "they only think me an anarchist. They never suspect the truth."

"It is rather hard on the poor Royal family," said Maisie.

"It is, cruelly hard, but life is full of injustice."

Maisie dimpled.

"May I have a chat with you now, Miss Maisie, as compensation?"

"Of course," said Maisie simply; "but no: mother is beckoning to me. Presently; I shall see you again."

Darracott gazed after her with admiration. How fair and slim and young she was! Her pretty face still retained the innocent look of a child grown suddenly tall, that is so beautiful, and in a way so pathetic. To Jack it seemed appealing. He felt sorry for her in this second-rate crowd.

Maisie's golden brown hair was divided down the centre, and coiled in a heavy knot at the top of her head. Her simple gown was of soft white, and her only ornament was a row of fine pearls round her slender throat. She might have been a little girl playing at being grown-up, he thought, and her own belief that she was comparatively old and wise added to this effect.

There was a sudden stillness as the Baron de Trouville announced that Miss Jenkins had kindly offered to sing, and conducted that lady to the piano.

There had been music at intervals during the evening, interrupted by chatter on the landing. Mrs. Carter imposed silence by crying 'Hush!' now and again, and rapping such of the culprits as she could reach with her fan.

Miss Jenkins sang in a full, throaty voice, with gasps and a tremulo. She chose a festive strain unknown to Jack, who could only catch the refrain, 'Strike the light, strike the light, strike the light guitar!'

There was a momentary parting of the crowd as

the song ended, and he took advantage of it. He was determined to meet Maisie, since for this alone he had come, and with some difficulty edged his way downstairs. He met her in the hall.

"Miss Maisie," said Darracott, "you are unkind. You have not given me a chance of saying a word to you to-night."

Maisie turned round smiling. She liked Darracott.

"I had so many people to speak to," she said, "and mother told me to see after the Coombes and the Vaughans and the Cayleys. They are strangers here."

"Then I receive no attention because I am not a stranger! But it is very wrong to neglect one's friends."

"Oh, now you are teasing. I did not neglect you. It was but a few moments ago that I saw you."

"And you passed me with a bow."

"There was no time for more, was there?"

"Are your multifarious duties over yet?"

"Oh yes — at least nearly. I have tried to set everyone talking with someone or other I fancied would suit them." She heaved a little sigh.

"And you have succeeded marvellously. Now that they are all enjoying themselves, cannot we sit down somewhere and enjoy ourselves likewise?"

Maisie sat down where two chairs stood opportunely vacant under a palm. Within the last

few weeks she had felt that besides her father she had somehow found another friend and sympathiser in the person of Jack Darracott. Very proud, sensitive, and rather shy, Maisie spoke with facility only where she was sure of being understood; and most of the spruce young men who hung round Mrs. Carter did not understand her at all.

Girls who flirted and made eyes and were 'up to larks' were the kind of girls they comprehended. Maisie grew accustomed to be passed over. In their set she suffered by contrast with her mother. As her pride was not unmixed with humility, she told herself it was quite natural, for no doubt she was dull, and unattractive, and too fond of books.

Jack drew his seat a little to one side that he might look at her without being observed. To her he was a pleasant friend with whom she felt quite at ease, and to whom she spoke with unaccustomed freedom. To him she had rapidly grown dangerously dear. What had a penniless young man to do with love and Maisie Carter? If only *The Comet*——

"How are you enjoying yourself this evening?" inquired Darracott.

"I should have asked you that," said Maisie.

"Don't try to put me off. I thought we agreed you were to tell me all opinions you formed about things and people. Let me see, you must have been to a number of parties by this, and have laid by quite a store of experiences."

"So I have," said Maisie with a little sigh, "but it is not at all what I expected."

"How is that; what did you expect?"

"Oh, I don't quite know. I thought somehow it would all be nicer. No doubt things never do come up to what one imagines beforehand; everybody tells one that, and then of course I am so ignorant and unused to society, as mother says. Most of it is my own fault."

"In what way?"

"Well, I am stupid. I don't seem to get on with people, and that depresses me. At school—don't laugh; of course it's quite different—at school I used to be rather popular, and I miss that very much. You may think it ridiculous," she spoke with sincerity, "but they really were fond of me, and here I make no friends. I don't know what to say to half the people I meet, or else I say the wrong thing, and I can see they—they don't take to me."

"Nonsense. You mustn't think that."

At this moment up swept Mrs. Golightly Carter. The pair were so absorbed in their conversation that they did not notice her approach.

"Oh, Maisie!" she cried, "are you here? I have been looking for you everywhere. Lady Sillery says she has not seen you yet, and here you are, boring poor Mr. Darracott with your chatter. She is a silly little girl, is she not, Mr. Darracott? A regular little convent mouse, who thinks the world a dreadful place."

Maisie had grown crimson to the roots of her hair, and to the tips of her delicate ears. She

jumped to her feet and looked at Darracott irresolutely.

"Oh!" she said, "did I? I am so sorry. Do forgive me."

He saw that her eyes were brimming, and that she winced under her mother's words. She looked a picture of mortification.

"Indeed you didn't," he said heartily. Afterwards he feared he had spoken too heartily, but he was indignant. "I was extremely interested, and I can hardly forgive you, Mrs. Carter, for taking Miss Carter away."

"Dear, dear!" laughed Mrs. Carter. "That's what I get for my sympathy! I made sure she was talking nonsense. She is as strict, you know, as if she were a little nun;" but Maisie looked at him, relieved though silent.

"Where is Lady Sillery?" he asked, "and I will take Miss Maisie to her."

"Over there, by the window."

They walked across the room without a word until they had almost reached Lady Sillery. Then Maisie spoke—

"I'm afraid you only said that out of kindness. I'm so sorry if I bored you."

"But indeed and indeed you did not. Could you not see that? I am very amiable, as you know, amiable to the point of weakness, but not amiable enough to endure being bored. Don't you remember how quickly I got you to release me from Mrs. Coates and Mrs.—Mrs. Dobbs?"

"Shortland Dobbs," said Maisie, with a somewhat watery smile.

"I beg her pardon. 'Shortland' Dobbs. You believe me?"

"Oh yes," said Maisie, but her spirits were damped, and Jack delivered her up in silence to Lady Sillery.

CHAPTER VI

THE DURHAM FAMILY

THE Durham family were at breakfast, father, mother, and seven children. A loaf cut irregularly stood on a platter in the centre of the table, accompanied by a piece of salt butter still half enveloped in the shop wrapping-paper. Little Archie had just upset his teacup, making a moist, brown splash right across the cloth. Under this Mrs. Durham had thrust a plate, so as to prevent the tea from staining the cover beneath. There was subdued quarrelling and scuffling amongst the children.

Mr. Durham, rosy-complexioned, well-fed, and carefully-dressed, looked up with sudden fierceness from the perusal of his letters. At his glance an uncomfortable hush and rigidity succeeded the shoving and bickering.

"Be silent!" thundered the father. "How dare you make that noise? Archibald, leave the room instantly! George, sit still, sir. Ellen, why can't you keep your children quiet? They are a perfect disgrace to you."

Mrs. Durham sighed helplessly.

Mr. Durham reabsorbed himself in his correspondence. After a time he spoke again.

"Jackson has written about *The Balmoral Magazine*. He will let me have it for two hundred pounds. It's a wonderful bargain at the money, just a nominal price he says."

"Oh, Archie, where on earth are we to get two hundred pounds? Coleman called for his bill yesterday, and the rent is nearly due, and the gas people sent a man to say they'll cut off the gas if we do not pay within ten days, and so did the Water Company."

"Tch!" said Mr. Durham impatiently. "How like a woman to worry a man about petty details. Can't you see that this is a unique chance of making our fortune?"

"You have said that so often," replied Mrs. Durham rather sharply, "but I'm sure if the gas and water are cut off you will be the one to grumble most, so if you have two hundred pounds to spare it would be well to let me have a little of it."

"I've not got it to spare," snapped Mr. Durham, "and you know it. You are only trying to provoke me. Can't you see that this magazine is a gold mine, a perfect gold mine? It would be madness to let the chance slip. Successful magazines sell by the hundred thousand. Suppose we sold only fifty thousand a month of *The Balmoral*, and that is a modest estimate—why, I hear *The Piccadilly* sells over seventy-two thousand a month in America alone—it will be fifty thousand shillings—two thousand five hundred pounds a month, exclusive of advertisements—thirty thousand a year. What do you say to that for an income? We'd soon be able to pay rent and taxes and everything else: yet you

hesitate and haggle over a paltry two hundred pounds! Women have no enterprise, no grasp of possibilities. They only see what is just under their noses."

He flung away from the uninviting breakfast-table with a frown and took up his position on the hearthrug, his back to the fire, his coat-tails over his arms. Their angry flicking showed the perturbation of his mind.

Mrs. Durham sat quite silent. The children had one by one slipped noiselessly out of the room, and their voices were now heard rising shrilly from the garden, so husband and wife were alone. She was a strongly-built, thin woman, with large incapable-looking hands. The rather gnarled fingers did not seem formed for taking hold of anything deftly or daintily, and the aspect of the breakfast-room showed no signs of a lady's care. She was one of those destined to suffer and protest ineffectually, without the power of remedying the evils of which they complain. By degrees, as she did not speak, her husband's thoughts took a more pleasant turn, he smiled to himself once or twice and nodded his head.

"Of course as soon as the magazine is an established success we shall leave here," he broke out at last. "There is a very fine house to be let or sold over at Clevington, 'The Manor' they call it; it used to belong to the Berkleys before their smash. It would just suit us, a fine park for the children, about twenty bedrooms, a gymnasium, lots of greenhouses and all that, and the finest stabling I ever saw in my life. By Jove! I shall be glad to swing my leg over the back of a good

horse once more, but—" regretfully looking down, "I shall want a weight-carrier now."

"It may be let before we require it," said Mrs. Durham dully.

"Not it. They can't let it, Coles, the agent, told me. It needs too much keeping up, but with thirty thousand a year, and prospects, I think we can afford it. Anyhow, Ellen, even if we do stay here another year or so, we'll improve the place. The Shaws next door are going away. We might take their house on a three years' agreement, and knock the two into one. We could make the gardens quite pretty if that wall were down. I should have a conservatory over there in the south-west corner, the Shaws' dining-room would make a nice billiard-room, and of course we shall refurnish the whole place."

"But what will be the use of laying out so much money," objected Mrs. Durham, "if we are to move to The Manor?"

"Well, Ellen, upon my life you are the greatest wet blanket that ever I met. You never enter into a man's ambitions, you never have a scrap of enthusiasm for his plans. Why, I was telling Miss Jenkins about my gold-mining schemes the other day, and you should just have seen how interested she was, and how she urged me to carry them out, whereas when I told you, you hemmed and hawed, and asked me what I knew about gold mining, and did not seem to be in the least carried away. It's disgusting, and you my wife."

"Well, we have been married twelve years, and all that time we have been, according to you, on

the very brink of making our fortunes, yet here we are to-day no better off. How can you wonder that I'm not enthusiastic? To tell you the truth, I'd be glad to see a few results before I begin to be enthusiastic. It has been nothing but disappointment all the time."

"Of course I know that," said Mr. Durham, a little dashed. "I admit I have been foolish in the past, but that is all over now. I've learned sense. I've had experience, I know the world and mankind thoroughly, and I'm a very different person from what I was when we married. That is the worst of you, Ellen. You never see that a man has changed. You remember all sorts of things that are past and gone. And then my ideas are good. It was only because I confided too much in other people that they miscarried. Now I confide in no one, I look at a project from every point of view before I adopt it, but when I do adopt it I'm adamant, adamant."

Mrs. Durham sighed.

"Take this present matter of *The Balmoral Magazine*, I have thought it out carefully. The sum which Jackson to-day tells me that he is willing to take is below my most sanguine expectations. There is a fortune in the thing if it gets into the right hands. Thirty thousand odd a year on the lowest computation, as I pointed out to you."

"But, Archie," she said after a time, "if it is such a gold mine as you say, how is it that Mr. Jackson is willing to sell it for two hundred pounds? Why does he not keep it, and make the money himself?"

"Um . . . a . . . well, the fact is Jackson is totally unfitted for the task. He has no literary skill, none whatever, and . . . in . . . in his hands the magazine will never be a success. It requires a man of first-rate ability; in fact, casting false modesty aside, it requires a man like myself to run it successfully. Jackson does not—he cannot—see its possibilities as I do, and all the better for us, my dear, that he does not. In my hands, Ellen, it will double its circulation month by month. The *furore* that 'The Pride of Pesth' alone will cause will be prodigious, and as for 'The Epic,' I foresee it will be the making of the magazine. Jackson is a mere hack, a fellow without brains or imagination,—destitute of the smallest spark of genius."

"But where are we to get the money?" interrupted Mrs. Durham, sending her husband off on a fresh tack.

"Another 'but'— Oh, the money! That two hundred pounds? Well, to tell you the truth I am depending on you for that."

"On me!" cried Mrs. Durham, astonished. "On me?"

"Yes, on you, or rather on your brother James. He could help us if he liked. Just you go and see him, and explain to him how important the matter is, and how sure we are to make a fortune out of *The Balmoral*. He'll give it."

"But James won't listen to me. He swore he would never lend you another penny, and you know how determined he is. Last time it was like getting blood from a stone. I couldn't induce him even to listen to me until I gave him a solemn

undertaking that if he would but hear me that once, I'd never, as long as I lived, ask him for another farthing."

"Oh, rubbish!"

"But it's not rubbish. James is as hard as a stone, and he meant what he said. I couldn't ask him again."

"Indeed you can, Ellen, and you must."

"I really can't, Archie."

"Yes, you can. What risk does he run? Tell him I'll pay him two hundred per cent. interest. I suppose that will satisfy him. Explain to him what a magnificent property this magazine is. We are getting it for nothing."

"But I said all that to him the time you wanted eighty pounds to get your novel published. He was to get double from you when it succeeded; and then it didn't sell much and he was so cross."

"Oh, that was different, quite different. Then I was dealing with a shark of a publisher, and, of course, it was his game to pretend to me that the book did not sell. He pocketed my money, and that was all he cared for. But to return to your brother James, you must get the money out of him."

"I tell you I cannot. Apart from other things, he is offended with you now. He says you were rude to him the last time he was here, and that he won't stand it, 'confounded impertinence' were the very words he used."

"Rude to him? I? How? When?"

"Last Sunday fortnight when he called. Don't you remember how you shut him up when he spoke

about Archie, and wanted to take him into the business ? "

" Oh, is it that ? To be sure I do, and richly he deserved it. How dare he offer to put a son of mine into his vulgar trade ! He ought to be glad to be admitted to a gentleman's house, without trying to pollute it with his infernal low-class notions. Shut him up ? I should just think I did."

" Well, he is very angry about it. I didn't like to tell you before ; but he said that if you were not above borrowing money made in trade, your son should not be above earning it."

" Did he say so ? Well, I shall take good care that he never crosses this threshold again. I should imagine it is the only gentleman's threshold he ever has crossed, the little cad. Instead of being grateful to me for having him here, and treating him almost as an equal, the man forgets himself completely, thinks it no compliment, and speaks to me just as he might to a person of his own grade and calibre."

" After all, Archie, James has not been bad to us, and I suppose he looks upon you as a relation ? "

" As a relation ? Because I happen to have married his sister is a fellow like that to consider me a relation ? No, Ellen, my dear, you need not look hurt. Believe me, I entirely disassociate you in my mind from your brother. But while I give you credit for many excellent qualities, and, I hope, treat you with the dignity due to the woman who is my wife, I cannot stand your family. James especially is unendurable ; and I will no

longer tolerate the idea of asking his assistance in this temporary crisis, and thus enabling him to benefit by my success. I say definitely, I forbid you to apply to him for money. You must not for a moment think of disobeying me in the matter."

Mrs. Durham looked relieved.

"But whom else can we ask?" she said after a short pause. "We do not know many people who can put down two hundred pounds."

"I have my own projects," said Mr. Durham. "It is possible I may apply to a very go-ahead fellow I have heard of, the Editor of *The Comet*. They tell me he is pushing his paper in the most marvellous manner, though it was in a very bad way when he took it over. It is a paper I never read, for, as you know, I hate papers. Still, he appears to be an intelligent man for a journalist; so he is sure to see his advantage in the matter, and I have not the slightest doubt that when I have exposed my plans to him he will advance me the sum I require. Meantime, I will write to Jackson and close with his offer. He says other people are considering the purchase of the magazine."

CHAPTER VII

MISS JENKINS RECONNOITRES

THE office-boy attached to the staff of *The Comet* was a character. He had been good-naturedly recommended for the position by Count MacCarthy de Burgo, for whom he had a respectful admiration, and his name was James Boyle. Boyle was about fourteen, but very short for his age, with a red face, wide mouth, snub nose, and sharp grey eyes. He had an old head on young shoulders, and a sententiousness that would have befitted his grandfather. He took a lively interest in 'our guv'nor, Mr. Darracott,' and the fortunes of the paper, identifying himself with both.

The success of the Matrimonial Lottery interested him keenly. He read all the comments on it, and rejoiced beyond measure at the daily growing demand for the paper. Already two new clerks had to be employed to deal with orders and correspondence.

Before the astonished eyes of Mr. James Boyle, did Miss Arethusa Jenkins present herself, the day after Mrs. Carter's party, to make enquiries as to the genuineness of the Matrimonial Lottery proposed by *The Comet*. Boyle had a dog, a collie picked

up somewhere; he was devoted to the creature, and sometimes smuggled it into the office. When the lady appeared he was teaching this animal to beg, snatching a brief leisure from his daily increasing duties, for it was an hour when few people called. The clerks had gone out to lunch.

The stranger's entrance annoyed him for three reasons: first, because he thought it looked youthful to be caught playing with a dog; second, because it looked bad for the paper, especially now when business had grown so brisk; finally, because Darkie barked furiously at the stranger, and this might lead to a reproof from Mr. Darracott, who had particularly requested not to be disturbed. Accordingly it was with a frown, and his most magisterial and grown-up air, that Boyle pushed the dog aside, and said, "Well, madam?"

The office-boy had a great admiration for the fair sex, but he liked women to be young and pretty, or at least tolerably good-looking, and Miss Jenkins did not meet with his approval. Next to being pretty, he liked them to be well-dressed, and he regarded the lady's singular costume with disfavour. He summed her up rapidly as 'a crank,' and decided she was not a person to be encouraged.

"Child," said Miss Jenkins, "I wish to see the Editor."

Boyle looked round in pretended bewilderment. He glanced up and down and under the table, then he said very slowly and severely—

"You're mistook, madam. There ain't no child here."

"I am addressing you, boy," said Miss Jenkins.

"Me!" cried Boyle in a disgusted tone. "I beg to inform you, madam, that I am a young man."

"Well, boy or man, it really does not matter," said Miss Jenkins with lofty indifference, "the point is, I wish to see the Editor."

"May I ask, madam, wot is your business?" enquired Boyle.

"You may not," said Miss Jenkins with dignity. "It does not concern you. I wish to see your master."

"I have no master, madam."

"You are impertinent. For the fourth time I beg to say I desire to see the Editor of *The Comet*."

"Sorry to say he's out, madam."

Miss Jenkins looked severely through her pince-nez at Boyle, but he did not blench.

"Will he be long?" she enquired after a pause.

"Can't tell you, madam, I'm sure. Sometimes he stays away all day, and sometimes he comes in immediate."

"I shall wait, then, on the chance of seeing him."

"I shouldn't advise you, madam, I shouldn't reely. I think this is one of the days when he'll stay away."

"Why should he stay away to-day, rather than any other day?" asked Miss Jenkins sharply.

"Oh, because—because—because it's a Tuesday."

"Boy," said Miss Jenkins with conviction, "I feel assured you are deceiving me, but I will not be put off. The Editor is on the premises, and

your conduct is disgraceful. I will complain to your superiors about it."

As she spoke, being a woman who did not stop at trifles, Miss Jenkins, before the lad could stir, deliberately walked behind the glazed partition where Boyle was seated, approached a door inscribed 'The Editor. Private,' and applied her eye to the transparent portion of the glass panel.

"There is a gentleman in there," she said. "I am certain he is the Editor."

She laid her hand on the door-knob, and would have entered, but that Boyle, much alarmed by this unexpected strategical movement, cried out, "Oh no, ma'am. Not he. That ain't the Editor at all. The Editor is quite different. That gentleman isn't to be disturbed on no account. He'll go on something horrid if you look at 'im."

"I do not believe you, boy," returned Miss Jenkins. "If he were not the Editor why should he be in the Editor's room? You do not know your place. I will go in and speak to him."

Boyle was horrified. He gathered from what Miss Jenkins had said that she was unacquainted with Darracott, and he was beside her in a flash.

"Oh no," he said persuasively, as he edged between her and the door, "you reely mustn't. No ladies are allowed in without they state their business. That ain't the Editor at all. You're mistook. If it's contributions, send them in by post with stamped addressed envelope for return."

"It is not contributions," said Miss Jenkins, "and I insist on your telling me who that gentleman

is, else I shall go in and ask him. If he is not the Editor, who is he ? "

Boyle hesitated, but the danger was imminent.

" That—" he said, " that is—" then with a sudden flash of inspiration,—" that, madam, is our Matrimonial Prize."

" The Matrimonial Prize," repeated Miss Jenkins eagerly. " Is he really ? "

" Yes," said Boyle. " We keep him there till he's won."

Arethusa applied her eye once more to the window, gazing long and earnestly on as much as she could see of Jack, whose back was towards her.

" But," she remarked in a tone of anxiety, " it said in the paper that he had auburn hair."

" So he has, madam," said Boyle, who had somewhat recovered his confidence, " quite auburn in the light, but a dark auburn you know, some people would call it brown."

" Oh, I don't object to brown," said Miss Jenkins softly.

Decidedly the Prize was worth winning. This was most satisfactory. Bashfulness held her back from pursuing her intention of entering, she would not mind facing the Editor, but the Prize !

" Will you please to stand outside ?' ' said Boyle, who saw her waver. " Strangers is not allowed to enter here." He had saved the situation.

Miss Jenkins moved backwards a pace, and Boyle posted himself between her and the door like another Horatius holding the bridge. She looked at him, hesitated a moment, then, her curiosity getting the better of her—

"Boy," she said, "I will give you threepence if you will give me some information."

He scanned her very deliberately.

"For thruppence," he said, "I can't give no information."

"Sixpence then?" said Miss Jenkins.

"No, nor for sixpence."

"A shilling?" said Miss Jenkins, laying down that coin.

"What d'you want to know?"

"Is this Matrimonial Lottery really genuine?"

"Genooine? Of course it is. Don't our paper stake its reppotation on it? If you knew *The Comet* better, madam, you would not ask the question."

"And, and is the gentleman—the—the Prize, you know, really a nobleman?"

"Well, I should just say so," said Boyle, who had not the faintest idea who the Prize was. "A real slap-up nobleman he is. Don't *The Comet* say so in this week's issue? 'A nobleman of ancient lineage.' Them's the words."

"Oh, but papers sometimes say more than is true," remarked Miss Jenkins sagely.

"Not our paper. It don't. You are thinking, no doubt, madam, of low-class publications like *The Journal* or *The Owl*, that copies all our ideas and never says where they got 'em. This here is none of your bogus swindle competitions, not it. So if you've got any daughters or nieces that is going to compete, just you tell them to hurry up."

Miss Jenkins was annoyed, but thought better

of it. The boy was very stupid; but then, he was so young.

"He is an earl, I understand," she said insinuatingly.

"Yes, that is just what he is," said Boyle. "An earl, and the finest kind of earl to be had. We do things in style on this paper."

"Is there—? Are there many—? Is there much competition for the Prize, do you know?"

"Immense," said Boyle emphatically; "an' we've only just started too. We had hundreds of letters already this morning, and since then they have been coming in by dozens with every post."

"But it's not too late to apply?" cried Miss Jenkins anxiously.

"Not it. Why, it's to go right on till the twenty-eighth of next month."

"I believe—a competitor may take more than one chance?"

"O lor! yes! as many as she jolly well likes, so long as she sends coupongs all correct, and a postal order each time."

"You are sure—quite sure that the prize-drawing will be fair and above-board?"

"Madam," said Boyle, "you have my word, and *The Comet's* word, for it that it will. We are all gentlemen here, and that is as good as our bond."

"Will you kindly let me have a copy of the paper? I want coupon twenty-two thousand two hundred and twenty-two," said Miss Jenkins. Then catching Boyle's eye, and seeing his mouth screwed up in a silent whistle, she added hastily, "For a friend."

That particular number happened, luckily, to be unsold, and was found without difficulty. Miss Jenkins paid for it and departed, radiant.

"A rum old girl," was Boyle's unspoken comment, as he saw her depart. "Blest if I didn't think she'd have burst in on top of the guv'nor, an' if she had, wouldn't he just have given me beans?"

CHAPTER VIII

THE DEVOUT LOVER

PREVIOUS to the opening of our story, Miss Arethusa Jenkins had for several months made her orisons at the shrine of Saint Sepulchre's in the West. With her mother, an ancient lady of peculiar habits, she had taken rooms close by, at 61 Camomile Street, in order to give full play to her devotion.

The well-known High Church, with its celibate clergy, is patronised by a fashionable congregation, and is so excellently modelled after the Roman style that it takes a Roman Catholic to tell the difference.

We have spoken of Miss Jenkins as queer-looking, we may add that she was also decidedly queer. Let us not be understood to insinuate that Miss Jenkins was insane. Her relations often felt that if she were only downright, unmistakably mad, mad enough to lock up, it would be a relief and a comfort to them.

When first Miss Jenkins came to the parish, the Rev. Augustine L'Estrange, the junior curate, was delighted with her. Sincere and overflowing piety like hers was all too rare in his experience. She attended the numerous services with the utmost

regularity, and never failed to appear at early celebration. She hungered and thirsted for parish work and for spiritual counsel.

As time wore on, however, the Reverend Augustine began to feel that he saw a little more of Miss Jenkins than he wanted. It is possible to have too much of a good thing. Miss Jenkins, no doubt, was a very good thing. That she should be anxious as to her spiritual welfare was but right and natural. Still the clergyman had to make her understand that she was not the only person in the congregation with a soul to be saved. She had scruples of the most uncommon kind, as to which she required advice at unreasonable hours. No sooner, too, were one set of doubts allayed than a fresh set sprang up, and in his endeavours to guide her aright the young man suffered mental wear and tear. His ecclesiastical armoury was not always furnished with suitable weapons to combat the various difficulties that suggested themselves to the lady. Moreover, her temporal affairs appeared to be strangely involved, and on them she likewise desired counsel. Amongst other things she wished to know if it would be right of her to marry one man while loving another. Poor Augustine, though surprised to hear that the days of love affairs had not passed for Miss Jenkins, listened patiently, and assured her that in his opinion, as her spiritual guide, she would be acting wrongly in bestowing her hand in a quarter where her affections were not engaged.

After this it pained him to observe that Miss Jenkins always took a seat near the pulpit, and

fixed him with her glittering eye, embarrassing him so much that he broke off twice in the midst of his sermon, and had difficulty in resuming. If he glanced in her direction by accident, she gave him a holy, a rapt, a beautiful smile that covered him with confusion. Moreover, all allusions in the hymns to love, or hearts, or affections, Miss Jenkins sang emphatically, nodding her head in a fashion quite peculiar, and gazing at the clergyman with undisguised emotion. He began to avoid Miss Jenkins: but this only hastened the climax, for the sole idea that struck the lady was that someone was trying to come between them, or that he was endeavouring to disguise his feelings.

One day Miss Jenkins waylaid the youth in the porch as he was leaving the church.

"Can you spare me a few minutes, dear Mr. L'Estrange?" she asked with a sweet smile.

"I . . . well . . . that is," stammered the embarrassed Augustine, "in fact, Miss Jenkins, I'm extremely busy."

"I know you are busy," said Miss Jenkins gently, "busy as ever, working for the salvation of your flock. And it is because I feel that MY salvation is in peril that I come to you for advice."

"Well, I can give you just three minutes, as I have an appointment."

Miss Jenkins looked at him reproachfully. "It is a short time to devote to a vital question, Mr. L'Estrange; still, I will do my best. Is there no place where we can sit down quietly and talk? I feel quite overcome."

"Oh, ah! I fear not," said Mr. L'Estrange.

"I fear I . . . a . . . really must request you to be brief."

"I will be brief," said Miss Jenkins. "I will be abrupt. . . . Tell me, oh, tell me as the guardian of my soul, as my spiritual guide, say, is it right, is it justifiable for me to wed a man who loves me to distraction, while at the same time I . . . I . . . I love another." She drooped her eyelids, lowered her voice, and tried to blush.

"You have asked me that question already," said Augustine wearily, "and I gave you my opinion that such a course of action would be exceedingly wrong. Why do you repeat your enquiry?"

"Because," cried Miss Jenkins wildly, "because the matter has become pressing, because I am being urged, being forced by circumstances to marry a man I detest."

"Is it possible," said the young man, "that your mother——?"

"Yes," replied Miss Jenkins. "She urges me—and—and there are other reasons into which I cannot enter."

"And the man to whom you say your affections are given," said Mr. L'Estrange, "why does he not come forward?"

Miss Jenkins hesitated.

"He does not know the true state of my affections," she murmured bashfully. "Perhaps he thinks I look for money or position, but I do not."

"I am sure you do not," said the curate soothingly. "But could you not convey this to him?"

"Is that your advice?" said Miss Jenkins.

"Well, so far as I can judge from what you tell

me, it is," said Augustine hesitatingly. "You say you are sure he returns your affection, so I should let him understand how you feel in the matter if I were you."

"I have tried to do so," said Miss Jenkins in a very low voice, "but perhaps I did not make my meaning clear. It is so difficult for a girl to—to encourage anyone."

"Then I should be plainer," advised the curate. "You tell me the happiness of your life is at stake. Why not give him to understand this? If he loves you he will not think the less of you; on the contrary, he will honour your courage."

"Oh, do you—do you really think so?"

"I cannot doubt it."

"Then I will no longer hesitate," said Miss Jenkins softly. "You are sure he will not treat my confession with coldness and disdain?"

"Well, if he is a gentleman," said the curate, "he is not likely to do that."

"Then I will speak," said Miss Jenkins, "I will risk all. Oh, Mr. L'Estrange, do you not see? Can you not feel? Must I say more? Will you compel me to do violence to . . . to the modesty of girlhood, and tell you more plainly who he is?"

"Bless me," said Augustine, whose complexion went first scarlet, and then ashen, "you cannot possibly mean . . ."

"But I do," cried Miss Jenkins. "You drag it from me, else would I die rather than reveal my secret. In the words of Scripture, 'thou art the man.'"

"Miss Jenkins, I am shocked. Oh, this is most embarrassing. Miss Jenkins, pray control yourself—the pew-opener is looking at you—control yourself I beg."

"I won't," said Miss Jenkins, now fairly started. "Oh, Augustine, have your feelings told you nothing? Have you not guessed that you are he for whose sake I am prepared to reject a most advantageous offer?"

"No," said Augustine, "I haven't. And, Miss Jenkins, this is extremely wrong. You know what my views are. I look on this as actually sinful."

"Oh, heavens! that I should hear you say so. Why, but a moment ago you advised me as a matter of conscience to marry the man I love."

"Yes . . . a . . . to be sure . . . but that advice was given in ignorance of the facts. My opinion now is that you had better by all means marry the gentleman who has proposed to you, and put out of your head, like a sensible woman, any ridiculous idea you may have formed with regard to me. I should be dreadfully distressed if you refused a good offer on my account."

"Do you call love a ridiculous idea?" questioned Miss Jenkins.

"I can listen to no more," said the Reverend Augustine, who was trembling with nervousness. "And I must request you to abstain from speaking to me in future. You know my convictions. Good-morning."

He recognised a passing churchwarden with joy. "Mr. Clarke, may I have a word with you?" he

cried, and protected by this burly pillar of the church passed out of reach of Miss Jenkins.

Amongst the thousands of readers who saw and commented on the advertisements of *The Comet* was Miss Jenkins. Her heart wrung by the alienation of the Rev. Mr. L'Estrange, she beguiled her sorrow week by week by reading accounts of the forthcoming Lottery, and of the wonderful, the unprecedented Prize. Little things are often big with fate. The fact that Miss Jenkins' landlord took *The Comet*, and that his wife good-naturedly lent it to her lodger, brought about many events having a direct bearing on our story. The quickest way to overcome misplaced affection for one man is to fall in love with another, and Miss Jenkins realised it.

When at last the scheme was revealed in its full magnitude, when Miss Jenkins had perused Otto Hazlitt's glowing description of MacCarthy, for twenty-four hours or more she forgot her misplaced affection for her spiritual adviser, and the injury he had done her by giving ear to base calumnies. She read and re-read the article. She pictured to herself this moustached, blue-eyed giant, this bold and reckless cavalier, this 'nobleman of ancient lineage,' how she loved the words, for in her mind lovers and maidens, towers and dungeons, traitors and enemies, wandering princes and disguised dukes were mixed in confusion. The grandiose had a powerful attraction for her. She saw herself through magic glasses that coloured all to her fancy. To her everything seemed possible. She invested herself with the charms, the sweet-

ness, the loftiness of soul, the high, pure, proud, sensitive nature of Marie Corelli's heroines, and decided that a woman so endowed was a fit match for any man; as indeed she would be, though whether any man would be a match for such a woman may be doubted.

When she laid down *The Comet*, she thought of herself as a lonely, lovely damsel, injured by a base—she now called him 'base'—ecclesiastic, and rescued by a knightly figure with a drooping moustache.

"A husband, a fortune, and a title." The words danced before her eyes. They contained all that she desired in life. If she wedded a noble —a proud noble — how surprised her enemies would be. Then she could afford to forgive them, to treat them with cold indifference. She would present a handsome donation to the Church of Saint Sepulchre's in the West, and leave the parish on the arm of her high-born husband with a flourish of trumpets.

Unfortunately this was only a chance. It depended entirely on drawing a lucky number. She would be but one amongst hundreds, nay thousands, of competitors. How could she hope to be successful? Yet after all, why not? Only one woman could secure him, might not she be that one? People were allowed to purchase as they liked. She would have as good a prospect as another, and it was worth her while to back her luck to the extent of several sums of half a crown each.

When Miss Jenkins went to sleep that night,

she dreamt that she stood before the altar of Saint Sepulchre's Church, being united in marriage, by the Rev. Augustine L'Estrange, to a knightly personage with auburn hair. The curate's eyes were full of tears, and he glanced at her reproachfully, but she haughtily averted her head. The bridegroom turned towards her and whispered tenderly, 'My dear Arethusa, you have won me, my rank, and my fortune, by your ticket twenty-two thousand two hundred and twenty-two!' Thrice the vision was repeated, thrice the winning number rang in her ear, and Miss Jenkins, who was very superstitious, took it as a solemn warning. She had heard that such things always came true. Still she took precautions. She did not act rashly. No; before deciding she called on Miss Skuse, the astrologer, and paid her a guinea to cast her horoscope. It proved to be extremely favourable. Jupiter and Venus being in the ascendant, showed honours and riches in store to be acquired through marriage. At this very remarkable confirmation of her dream, Miss Jenkins was quite overcome, especially when Miss Skuse went on to say that the companionship of the great was indicated, and that if she could but avert the malign influences of Saturn and Mars, which threatened some misfortune, her dearest hopes would be fulfilled. Having had all this confirmed by Baron Crystoleum, the palmist, who promised her she would wed a man of distinction, acquire money and go much into society, Arethusa looked on the matter as settled. Her only fear was that the Lottery might prove a swindle.

She had the mingled belief in, and distrust of newspapers, that is so common. She resolved to inspect the office of *The Comet*, interview the Editor, and make sure that no cheat was intended, before she committed herself to entering the lists. Thus it was that she presented herself before Boyle.

CHAPTER IX

THE BOOM

"FAITH, I think it's going to be a big success," remarked Count MacCarthy de Burgo to Jack Darracott, as he called at the office of *The Comet* to learn how matters were progressing. "There's money bid for me it seems."

"Looks like it," said Jack. "Four hundred and fifty letters came by yesterday's post, nine hundred and thirty by last night's, two thousand have come already to-day. We can't deal with them. I have had to advertise for more clerks."

"And this is only the beginning," said Hazlitt.

"We have sold out two large editions of the paper with the coupon," continued Jack, "a third is in the press, and we have so many applications from the newsagents that I believe we shall run to a fourth or fifth before they are all filled."

"Now I suppose every copy sold represents at least two readers?" said the Count.

"Two! It represents four, at least, from first to last, and if even one woman out of every ten that sees it resolves to compete, your fortune is secure."

"Wait till the scheme begins to boom in the

provinces," cried Hazlitt. "This is nothing. The letters received are almost entirely from London and the neighbourhood. Give the notion time to reach America and the Colonies, and wait till you read my next week's article on the scheme."

"Look through this batch," said Jack, "and if the ladies are half as beautiful as they say, you'll be difficult to please if one or other does not come up to your standard."

"They're interesting reading inyhow," said the Count. "Here a little darling says she 'does so hope to win.' Upon me soul, me dear, I hope you may. She'd 'love to marry a nice man with a title.' She is 'just seventeen,' with 'golden hair, blue eyes and a clear complexion, small and slender.' Her spelling, I see, is a little defective, but what is spelling to a loving heart? She signs it 'Rosebud.' 'Rosebud,' I wish you every success. You're a trifle young for me, but sure that's a fault on the right side. Faith, if I could I'd contrive that you'd get me, for I'm won already."

"Here's another," said Jack, "that may shake your allegiance to 'Rosebud.' 'Queen Maud' is 'stately and tall, with regular features, dark flashing eyes and curling hair, a beautiful figure, and an affectionate disposition. She is twenty-seven, accomplished, a good skirt dancer, and an excellent musician, possesses a lovely voice. She would grace a nobleman's family.'"

"I adore music," remarked the Count, "and dark flashing eyes are my passion."

"Here too is 'Nobody's Darling,' 'petite, plump, vivacious, loving, a first-rate housekeeper. Has

masses of exquisite red-brown hair and a good complexion.' "

" 'Nobody's Darling.' That's sad now!" said the Count. "I'd gladly make her mine. Faith, 'tis a sin that there's a law against polygamy. A good housekeeper too; just what a man wants. They're rare. It's the oldest profession for women and the worst filled. I declare lots of the girls you meet seem proud of knowing nothing about it, though they might as well be proud of being bald. Have you iny more?"

"There seems to be a run on 'Violets' of various kinds," said Jack; "here's a 'Wild Violet' and a 'Wood Violet,' a 'White Violet,' a 'Neapolitan Violet,' a 'Rhine Violet'—five Violets in all, so far."

"Take care you don't get them mixed up," said the Count anxiously.

"No fear," said Jack. "The numbers will be entered. 'Wood Violet' says she is of a 'haughty nature,' yet tender and loving. 'Over twenty-one years of age and of high family. Pines for companionship and the devoted affection of one who will be all in all to her. She excels in many accomplishments, and is fond of animals, especially of dogs. Her manners are gentle and winning. She is considered handsome. Attracts admiration and attention wherever she goes, but seeks only to find a true heart on which she can rely with confidence.' "

"Mine be that heart," said the Count, slapping his chest. "Our tastes agree. 'Tis an embarrassment of riches, but I like 'Wood Violet's' spirit. I hope I may get her. But I wish this Prize Drawing

were over. The uncertainty is wearing me nerves."

"Hang it, man," said Hazlitt, "look at the postal orders tumbling in. Beguile the time by counting them. See here, ten thousand three hundred and ninety-four letters already. That means over two thousand pounds. If it goes on like this every day it will come to a pretty penny."

"I like the prospect," said the Count. "It's miny a day since I've had two hundred to me credit. I told me old lady I had a reasonable prospect of making a few pounds, and she's in great spirits. She and I, we know what it is to be poor, and we don't like it. Sure, Darracott, this is a great idea."

"You'd be a long time fighting in every unhealthy climate under heaven, a long time sweating as a free-lance journalist, a long time dashing round the world as a war correspondent," said Otto, "before you'd make the tenth of what will soon be tumbling at your feet by a fluke."

As he spoke a man staggered into the room with a sack of letters, and announced that three others, similar, were waiting below.

"What did I say?" asked Hazlitt. "It's a boom."

And a boom it proved to be.

The postal authorities had to make special arrangements. Vans discharged their contents at the office every two hours. The second staff of clerks proved inadequate to cope with the correspondence, and two dozen others were employed to assist in

sorting and docketing the coupons, entering the numbers, and the dates of reception. All letters, too, were set aside for future reference, dainty scented missives on thick, monogramed paper; splashy notes on thin; dirty, ill-spelt communications; queer, lengthy, rambling epistles; short, business-like notes, correspondence from France, Germany, India, America, the Cape; from women of all ranks and ages; rich girls and poor, plain girls and pretty, old girls and young; anxious mothers on behalf of their daughters, guardians recommending their wards; ladies of fortune from the United States forwarded glowing accounts of their riches and charms, backed by newspaper cuttings of a eulogistic character describing them as 'buds' and 'daisies.' Several enclosed photographs that sent the Count into raptures. Others offered to make a settlement on their husband.

No 'Missing Word' or other rival scheme ever attained such proportions and popularity. Post-offices in country parts of England were swept clear of half-crown postal orders, and in some places the subject of the competition was so much in the air that the most married matrons, the most confirmed spinsters, hesitated to ask for that sum, fearing to see a smile of mistaken intelligence on the face of the attendant. One cannot argue with a smile, and it rankles.

Within an incredibly short space of time competitors were to be numbered by the hundred thousand, and a vast sum of money was in hand to the credit of *The Comet* and Count MacCarthy

de Burgo. Jack began to believe that after all he might make a fortune, and with this cheering prospect before him his spirits rose, and he determined to give himself a treat in the shape of a visit to Maisie.

CHAPTER X

MR. DURHAM CALLS

MR. DURHAM'S brother-in-law, Mr. James Grogan, proved as obdurate as Mrs. Durham had predicted. He was an obstinate, close-fisted, business-like man, who by hard work had made money pound by pound, and was loath to part with it save on a good security. His poor sister had done violence to herself in asking his assistance, but Mr. Durham had a 'wonderful way with him' of persuading her against her better judgment. The oft-disillusioned wife began to think she had, perhaps, been unduly pessimistic as to the future of *The Balmoral Magazine*, and if money was to be borrowed, she decided it would be preferable to borrow it from a relation.

"Not me. It isn't good enough. I know Archie too well," was Mr. Grogan's answer to her pleadings. "What chance have I of ever seeing my money again? What has he to live on but what I'm allowing him? an' he treating me all the time like dirt beneath his feet. I tell you, Ellen, I won't advance him another penny piece, but I'll give you a pound or two for yourself, if you promise to let him have none of it."

Mrs. Durham vainly plied her brother with all her husband's arguments at second hand, keeping back her own doubts, and pretending to think the fortune of the family was about to be made. The vague splendour of the future as seen through the eyes of Mr. Durham, the run that would be made by the public on *The Balmoral*, wherein, for the first time in an English magazine, pure literature was to be combined with enthralling interest, a high moral tone, and a large amount of instruction; the fabulous sums that would be made by it, the honours and emoluments that would result to all connected with it, were painted by her as directed.

Mr. James Grogan remained unconvinced, and his sister went home as poor as she came, for she would not promise not to share with her Archie. It was evident to Mr. Durham that he had now no choice save to apply to Mr. Darracott for help, and accordingly he resolved to call at the office of *The Comet*.

He found it in the greatest state of bustle and excitement; messengers coming and going, an army of clerks sorting the correspondence, and a staff of a dozen young women clicking away at typewriters. Jack was invisible, nor could Boyle, who gave himself airs of the utmost importance, inform Mr. Durham when it would be possible to see him. It was Boyle's ambition to show strangers that he was a force to be reckoned with, that he sat on his stool in the little den marked 'Enquiries' in a position of authority, representing the paper, and in that capacity demanded recognition and respect,

as Marmion from Douglas. The self-importance of the small boy was not without effect on Mr. Durham, and the more difficult he found it to see Jack, the more important he esteemed it to secure his co-operation. Like many men and women of his kind, the best way to secure his consideration was to snub him. Accordingly he retired more anxious than ever to obtain the help and countenance of Mr. Darracott.

When at last the impossibility of seeing Jack, without first disclosing the nature of his business, was made evident to Mr. Durham, he yielded to Boyle's advice, and wrote frequently and fully to the gentleman. He prided himself upon his epistolary style. His letters were models of originality. A critic might complain that they were somewhat lengthy, but they were eloquent and persuasive; they ran through every tone, blandishment, expostulation, recrimination, threat. They amused Jack, for he had thought that the kind of literary man represented by Mr. Durham was extinct. Mr. Durham might have been a contributor to the *Eatanswill Gazette* in the days of Mr. Pickwick. There was in all his ideas something simple, bombastic, and early Victorian that is out of place in the twentieth century. The replies to his epistles were short and emphatic. Mr. Darracott did not see his way to advancing the money required; and all his correspondent's eloquence failed to make him alter his decision. It took Mr. Durham a long time to understand that the refusal was serious. But he retired at last, with a keen sense of injury, and the worst possible opinion

of the editor of *The Comet*, whom he had never met. Thus opinions are formed.

Now that Mr. Darracott had betrayed the hopes centred in him, and shown a lack of appreciation not to have been anticipated in a man of reputed intelligence and enterprise, Mr. Durham in his disappointment at his vulgar, mercenary, soulless brother-in-law, and the cold, cautious, calculating Jack, for a time hated all men. His thoughts, however, turned to women. Women had ever been the helpers of genius. His wife's small income had gone long ago. It had been her privilege to aid him in his schemes—schemes which but for unforeseen circumstances would have already crowned him with glory. Still, there were in the world other women who would feel proud to help a great man to win the fame rightfully his. He remembered Miss Jenkins, who had shown such interest in his plans, and proceeded to call on her, having previously written to make an appointment. Miss Jenkins put her old mother to bed, and received her visitor graciously. To her he unfolded his plans. The world is full of people who know a man is great when they are told so. As Mr. Archibald Durham told of his greatness to everyone, he had a large though varying circle of acquaintances who were, or had been, impressed by his ability. He was indeed so obviously, so obtrusively literary, he took himself so seriously, he used such energetic language, was so primed with quotations, so well provided with the entire stock-in-trade of the unsuccesful genius, that the dullest could scarcely mistake him. It spoke volumes for his

kind of ability that he so often persuaded stupid people to believe in him, for the stupid are exceedingly difficult to convince of anyone's merit save their own. From the ranks of his acquaintances Mr. Durham had more than once obtained financial assistance to aid him in getting at the great public in whom he trusted, in breaking down the ring of corrupt editors and publishers that stood between a gifted writer and fame. Acquaintances thus promoted into friends, however, seemed in the end to change their minds, and few continued to back him for any length of time. This naturally enraged him against them far more than if they had never backed him at all. Fortunately, however, the world is wide and populous, and in London new people crop up every day. To the charm of his manner to strangers, his easy, gentlemanly conversation, his taste in dress, his 'man of the world' air, his imposing opinion of himself, his crushing contempt for opponents, his surface sparkle, his natural lightness of heart, Mr. Durham owed, in a dull world, the money that somehow kept him going, the occasional windfalls out of which he brought home a fan or a bouquet to his wife, when she pined for a good dinner or a new gown, when the rent was unpaid, and the children's toes were peeping through their boots.

Miss Jenkins had a high opinion of Mr. Durham. One of the curious facts of life is that none are more easily imposed on by lies than liars, by pretence than pretenders. One might think that, like thieves, their knowledge of ruses would make them see through deceptions, but it does not.

Without wishing to suggest that Miss Jenkins or her friend was untruthful, it may be mentioned that they were people who invariably saw facts in the light that best suited them, consequently each was immensely impressed by the other. Mr. Durham now opened his heart to the lady. He told her of his disappointments, of the harshness of the world, of his great novel still unprinted, his great drama still unacted, his great epic still unwritten, his comedies, his lyrics, his sonnets, his short stories, his essays, all the literary productions that showed his versatility. He read to her with unction and declamatory power some of his minor pieces, and Miss Jenkins, who fancied she had an uncultivated dramatic gift, was delighted. Mr. Durham was such a charming man! He was such an addition to her small parties, he was such a delightful escort. What a pity, too, that he was thrown away on Mrs. Durham, a person of quite inferior social position, a meek, domestic creature who had no soul, no feeling, no enthusiasm, and did not properly appreciate her husband's greatness.

When Mr. Durham approached the subject of *The Balmoral Magazine*, the magazine that, were it his, would make the fortune of all connected with it, the magazine in which his masterpieces might be given to the world, the magazine that was to be had for the paltry sum of two hundred pounds, Miss Jenkins almost wept to think he should have such difficulty in raising the amount. He was temporarily embarrassed, he said, and had unfortunately not so much money in hand at this critical moment. He had, indeed, made certain of raising it, but first one

false friend and then another had failed him, and now he saw this glorious chance about to be lost, though he was prepared to pay no less than twenty per cent. interest on all advances, and though the sum borrowed could be readily paid back within six months. He would give a bill for the amount.

Miss Jenkins opened her eyes. She was drawing four and a half per cent. from her little capital, and she reflected in a flash that an increase of fifteen and a half per cent. per annum would make a notable addition to her income. This was an opportunity that might not recur. Unfortunately she could not realise some of her securities without delay, but she had about four hundred pounds free. She made a rapid mental calculation—eighty pounds a year as against eighteen pounds. It was too tempting! Oh, if only her entire income might be thus augmented! She was carried away by the prospect.

"Do not be offended at a suggestion I am about to make, dear Mr. Durham," she said with much sweetness.

"Offended, dear lady? I could not possibly be offended at anything you would say," replied Mr. Durham anxiously. Was she about to refuse—to make difficulties?

"But I may be suggesting something that will not suit your plans, and if so will you forgive a woman's lack of business knowledge?"

"Certainly, dear lady." Mr. Durham was a man who was fond of saying 'dear lady.'

"Then would it be feasible for me to advance the necessary sum? I suppose the security is really good?"

"Feasible! of course! Dear lady, I am astonished and delighted. I never thought of you in this connection. My idea was to put the matter before some great City magnate, knowing how keen such persons are to secure a certainty. But if I am to be the means of benefiting a friend rather than a stranger, I shall be delighted."

"And the security?" said Miss Jenkins gently.

"I offer my personal security. Is that good enough? I shall accept this merely as a loan, and if at any time you desire to have your principal back, it will be paid to the day. Believe me, *The Balmoral* is destined to produce riches beyond the dreams of avarice."

"That is very satisfactory," said Miss Jenkins.

"I joyfully accept your generous offer as a proof of confidence in me. For my part I have never understood the overstrained delicacy that prevents men from borrowing of a friend, if that friend happens to be a woman. I am intensely modern in my views. I am all for placing men and women on an equal footing in such matters, and I will not do you, dear lady, the injustice of treating you as if you were different from a man chum."

Mr. Durham beamed. He even took the hand of Miss Jenkins and pressed it with fervour. Then having expressed his undying gratitude, he hastened off to see Jackson, and conclude negotiations.

Miss Jenkins was a lady who in general was no fool in money matters. She liked to get a pennyworth for a penny, and managed her small income with admirable prudence and dexterity. Accord-

ing to her landlady, no closer hand at a bargain had ever occupied the drawing-rooms at 61 Camomile Street, and Arethusa succeeded in obtaining on inclusive terms privileges for which other lodgers had to pay dearly as extras. She had as a lodger a useful habit of taking for granted concessions that it would be embarrassing to withdraw.

On this occasion, however, she had been fascinated, convinced, by Mr. Durham. His enthusiasm had infected her; she had made her offer as a sort of act of faith in this great man. Now that he had gone, she began to repent of her rashness, and to wonder whether she had acted wisely. When next he saw her he found she was inclined to hesitate, to temporise. To screw her courage to the sticking-point took several interviews, during which he waxed eloquent over the enormous success of *The Piccadilly*, the vast profits accruing to the shareholders, and its inferiority in everything to *The Balmoral*. He brought before her an array of facts as misleading as his figures. In the end, persuaded once for all that she would be the gainer in every way by aiding his enterprise, Miss Jenkins handed over a cheque for two hundred and fifty pounds. As a result there was for a time profound peace in the Durham household. The father of the family was happy. He paid off one or two troublesome creditors, bought new clothes, a silver lamp, a handsome vase for the drawing-room, looked out a ton of manuscripts, and entered joyfully into possession of *The Balmoral Magazine*.

CHAPTER XI

MAISIE HAS VISITORS

MRS. GOLIGHTLY CARTER was out, and Maisie sat alone in the drawing-room reading. Her embroidery had dropped from her fingers, and she had wandered into a fairyland of thought where life was noble and beautiful.

Had Maisie been a young woman of the good-natured, rowdy sort her mother affected, Mrs. Carter would have understood her perfectly and liked her extremely. As it was, her mother, though really fond of her, and proud, too, of her good looks and her air of breeding, found something incomprehensible and a little chilling in Maisie's high standard. The girl seemed to belong to a different sphere, and Mrs. Carter felt like a hen that had hatched a duckling. Maisie was not loud. She had a low, sweet voice, and seldom raised it. She never racketed, nor chased people up and down stairs, nor called men she scarcely knew by their Christian names, nor dared them to kiss her, nor 'made eyes,' nor wrote surreptitious love-letters, nor 'carried on,' nor did any of the other things that Mrs. Carter looked on as 'fun,' and 'quite natural' in a girl. If she had done them, her

mother would have felt more at ease. Maisie was too little vulgar for her mother's taste; moreover, she seemed to see through feminine wiles and to despise them. Her clear glance appeared somehow to penetrate all the decent outer wrappings that hid ugly things, and made those who encountered it ashamed. Now this was very annoying, the more so as it was quite unintentional on Maisie's part. She got credit for being much more observant than she actually was; and with the very observant people are ill at ease. What only amused her mother, annoyed and sometimes disgusted her. And yet the girl was open and natural as the day, and absolutely free from primness. She just acted as her nature inclined her, but hers was a nature different from Mrs. Carter's. She was withal so pretty, so attractive, and so free from self-consciousness, that her mother wondered where such a nice-looking girl could have got such notions. That she was bright and intelligent, fond of books, and interested in everything literary and artistic, only irritated Mrs. Carter. Not that she objected to such tastes in moderation. They were nice and quite necessary, but to discuss favourite authors or historical questions with young men was really waste of time, when Maisie might be having a jolly flirtation, and should already be looking about her with a view to establishing herself in life. To this desirable consummation the girl seemed profoundly indifferent. She devoted herself in no way to the men she met. She threw herself at nobody's head, and as they were accustomed to girls who did, they thought her cold. Once, indeed, she

said she hated them, their town-bred ways, their lack of individuality, their pallid faces, well-cut clothes, and small talk. For her part she'd sooner marry a peasant with individual character than someone who was merely a type of a class. Mrs. Carter was shocked at such an idea: but Mr. Carter encouraged his daughter in her queer notions.

"They're a poor lot, my darling," he said, "not half good enough for my little girl. There is not the making of a man in a dozen of their kind; and they're all bad in exactly the same unoriginal way. Wait till Mr. Right comes along. Don't be in a hurry to choose."

If Maisie had little capacity for flirtation, she had enormous power of affection. There was a hint of unawakened passion in the curves of her lip and nostrils, and the warmth of her heart was unbounded.

How she had moved unharmed hitherto amidst loose-tongued people was a mystery to Jack Darracott. Her innocence carried her through many dangerous situations, that and the control of straying thoughts which had been so forcibly inculcated by convent teachings and discipline. From hearing so much of 'love,' and seeing it associated by her acquaintances with vulgar rompings, horseplay, and intrigue, she had acquired something of a schoolboy's contempt for sentiment. Love-making as she saw it she held to be something quite distinct from the grand, vague possibilities of understanding and companionship, the sweet and subtle intercourse of which she dreamed. That was

sacred; but 'love'—she despised what she knew by the name.

Under her mother's eye she read many books that would never have found their way into the school library, nor into any careful home. When a girl has no knowledge of evil, however, she may get but a superficial acquaintance with it from literature. Life alone gives her a clue to what she has read. It is those who know, that see how often a great deal may be implied by an apparently simple expression; and the most innocent are not always the most easily shocked. Maisie had no acquaintance with the dark side of human relationships, and most of what she read passed harmlessly misunderstood. Still, in her six months at home she had developed mentally, and had come to realise dimly that there were in life vast and tragic possibilities that alarmed her. She shrank from enquiring into their nature, or framing such questions for herself. One of her difficulties in consulting her mother was that she feared too much explicitness on her part. Subjects that Maisie scarcely dared approach Mrs. Carter discussed with a laugh, from which the girl shrank as from a desecration of the Holy of Holies.

The curious comprehension of her difficulties that she divined in Jack Darracott had drawn her to him. She scarcely understood her own feelings. She liked Jack because he was different from the other men she met, had more grit in him, more depth of feeling, more capacity for hard work, more power of thought. He could explain to her

what was formless yet troubling in her own mind. She told herself he was more of a man than the others. He brought a breath of fresh air into the over-heated moral atmosphere of her home. She disliked instinctively the feminine softness of the white-handed young gentlemen who came to her mother's parties. She felt that such persons away from Piccadilly, away from shops and pavements and pretty girls and clubs and theatres, would be poor creatures, like fish out of water, unfit to take their share of toil or manly exercise. But Jack could 'do things.' Herself a fine horsewoman, she appreciated his knowledge of horses, and his seat in the saddle. He could shoot straight, and hunt, and swim. He loved, as she did, the open air and the mountains better than the town. His life had more than once been in danger in uncivilised lands, and he had saved it by his resourcefulness and dexterity. Now she knew he was fighting hard to make a fortune, not solely, she felt, for his own sake, but because he had relations depending upon him, a mother to please whom he had remained in London when a career abroad beckoned to him. She felt deep interest in the book he contemplated, the book of which he had spoken to her, the book of which he had such hopes. He made on her an impression of strength and power, of mental and bodily vigour that led her to rely on him more than on anyone after her father.

As she sat there dreaming by the fire this particular afternoon she was startled by hearing the servant announce 'Mr. Scarlette.' She jumped to her feet, picked up her book and her work with

some embarrassment at having been surprised, and advancing shook hands with the new-comer. Had Mrs. Carter been there she would have scolded her for not having allowed the young man to recover her belongings, but Maisie was still so much of a schoolgirl that she did things for herself on the impulse of the moment.

She was not pleased to see Mr. Scarlette. Of all her mother's acquaintance he was the one she most disliked. With that curious sixth sense that belongs to the innocent, and may be lost by neglecting it, she felt him to be a bad man, and was uncomfortable in his presence, though without being able to give the slightest reason for the feeling. Now she barely offered him her finger-tips, and resented the long, close pressure in which he held them.

"I am sorry my mother is not at home," she said.

"And I, Miss Carter, am glad," he replied in his mannered way. "Delighted as I always am to see Mrs. Carter, you make such an excellent substitute that I cannot regret her absence. May I throw myself upon your hospitality for a cup of tea?"

"Oh! certainly," said Maisie, ringing the bell. She had had a faint hope that when he heard her mother was out he would go. "How could Parkins have been so stupid as to show him up for *me* to entertain?" she thought.

'Dolly' Scarlette, as his friends called him, was tall and good-looking, though pale and inclined to be stout. He seemed flabby and in bad con-

dition, Maisie thought. She hated his smile and his way of looking at her.

He was dressed with irreproachable taste, and exhaled a faint, delicate perfume, the latest fashionable scent. "He makes me think of a great, soft, white toad," she said to herself, and shuddered.

"It is such a pleasure to turn in here for a chat in the gloaming," he went on. His manner with women was always caressing. He seemed at once to monopolise them, speaking in a gentle, confidential fashion that made people think he must be entrusting his hearer with important secrets. Since Mrs. Carter's party he had called thrice, and made himself very amiable to Maisie, but she had avoided him. He had accordingly come this afternoon because he had seen her mother with Mrs. de Prazza, and guessed the girl would be alone, but this, of course, he did not say. In the days of his popularity, when he had been welcome everywhere, half the women in London had been in love with him. He had been the fashionable amusement for two seasons. His handsome face, sweet voice, and poetical gifts exaggerated to genius, were supposed to be conjointly irresistible. He had an assured air that goes down with many women, an air of certainty of being a favourite. Maisie resented it. Despite his social misadventures he felt he was condescending in knowing the Carters at all. That a little nobody, however pretty, should be otherwise than flattered at his notice never entered his head. Maisie, he thought, would probably boast to her friends if he paid her attention. And

she was really lovely; what a complexion! Aristocratic-looking too. But what a set she lived amongst! She would welcome a man like himself as a lover.

He drew a chair so close to the girl that he almost touched her.

"What have you there?" he asked, taking her book off her knee.

It was a volume of Rossetti. He turned over the pages.

"Do you not like this?" he said, and without waiting for her to reply began to read in a full, rich voice—

> "The Blessèd Damozel leaned out
> From the gold bar of Heaven:
> Her eyes were stiller than the depths
> Of water stilled at even:
> She bore three lilies in her hand
> And the stars in her hair were seven."

He read with exquisite feeling.

Maisie could not resist poetry. It thrilled and warmed her. She had never before heard anything like this, and listened with sparkling eyes and parted lips.

"How beautiful!" she said, as he stopped.

"Is it not?" and he said no more, as if absorbed in remembrance.

Tea was brought in, and broke the spell. Maisie made it a little awkwardly, for she was unused to receiving people without her mother's support. As she handed 'Dolly' his cup, he contrived to touch her fingers, and held them for a second so that she could not get them free. Maisie drew back

her hand so hastily that she nearly upset the tea, and coloured crimson with confusion.

"I beg your pardon," he said quietly, as if he had brushed her by accident. But she knew it was no accident, and wished with all her soul that someone would come.

"Do you often receive your friends thus *en tête-à-tête* in the afternoon?" he asked.

"No," said Maisie bluntly. "Never! It was quite a mistake for Parkins to show you up when my mother was out."

"Because, if you do, I should often avail myself of the privilege. There are so many things I should like to discuss with you."

"But I do not," persisted Maisie.

"If you do not," he went on with suave impertinence, "so much the better; for I shall try to persuade you to make an exception in my favour, and then we shall not have people coming in to interrupt us."

Inexperienced Maisie did not know what to say. She grew hot and cold, resenting not the words but the manner, yet uncertain how she could check him without being rude. Her mother, she knew, thought a great deal of Mr. Scarlette, as a poet and the son of a peer. It takes practice and self-confidence for a girl to learn how to set a man in his place, and at the same time leave him nothing to cavil at. Moreover, Maisie scarcely knew what was permitted to a visitor and what was not. She had only her judgment to go by, and was nervously anxious not to make scenes over what was perhaps but a commonplace of society manners. Though

she felt that Mr. Scarlette was presuming, she warred with the instinct that bade her leave the room. On his part, he was playing his game with less than his usual *finesse*, because he had taken it for granted that Mrs. Carter's daughter would scarcely need delicate treatment. Maisie seemed disturbed, she seemed annoyed, but that no doubt was only acting. Men of the world—so called—seldom realise how innocent good women are. Silly girls, indeed, who talk as if they knew a great deal of evil, often understand only the outside of things, and by no means realise the full significance of what they say, though they get credit for knowing exactly what they are saying.

"I don't think my mother would like it," said the girl.

"Oh, she would not mind," said 'Dolly' with easy assurance. "From what I have seen of you, I think you would be severer than your mother, Miss Carter. Are you very severe?"

As he spoke he drew his chair closer.

"Not to people I know well," replied Maisie, moving back.

"But if you keep your friends at arm's-length you will never know them well."

The girl was silent, and for sheer nervousness kept on pouring milk into her tea until it overflowed into her saucer. Scarlette liked watching her changing face, the head held high, the eyes lowered, the cheeks blazing, her mingled expression of anger and embarrassment. Really he did not expect such youthfulness, such lack of *aplomb*; but it was very pretty.

"Why did you avoid me when I called before?"

"I didn't avoid you," said Maisie mendaciously.

"Oh yes, you did. You occupied yourself so carefully that you had scarcely a moment for me. Are you afraid of me?" he asked very softly.

"No," said Maisie, suddenly flashing her great eyes on him. "I am not, but I wish you wouldn't talk to me like that."

"Like that? Like what? How am I talking? What have I said?"

Again irresolution came on Maisie. What *had* he said? It was only his manner. Perhaps he had just meant to be friendly. After all, if a girl had caught her hand she would have taken it as a kindly caress, and why should she feel so angry with a man? Still she wished someone would come. The instructions of Sister Angela had not prepared her for such emergencies!

"You are unkind," said 'Dolly' reproachfully after a long silence. "My only desire is to win your—a—your esteem. Will you forgive me and be friends?"

"I did not know that we were enemies," said Maisie, forcing a laugh.

"You evade me. Say that we shall be friends."

"Oh, of course we shall be friends. I don't want to quarrel."

"Then give me your hand on it," and he laid his lightly on her arm.

"There is no need," said Maisie, drawing herself free.

"I shall not look upon our compact as ratified unless you do."

"Very well," said Maisie. "It must go unratified."

"How unkind. Have you no heart?"

"No," said Maisie.

"I don't believe it. You are fond of poetry," said 'Dolly' suddenly.

"Yes."

"I saw that when I read you 'The Blessed Damozel.' Why will you not look at me again like that? You even avoid glancing at me. That is not friendly, though you say we are friends."

"Like what?"

"With your soul shining in your eyes. Do you know what was in your eyes?"

"No," said Maisie miserably.

"Would you like me to tell you, Miss Maisie?"

"I'd rather not. I . . . I do not care."

"Oh yes, you do. Have you nothing of a woman's curiosity in you?"

"No," said Maisie in a stifled voice.

"But you have, Miss Maisie. . . . What a sweet name . . . Maisie! It is there whether you deny it or not, and I will gratify it." He sank his voice to a whisper. "What I saw shining in your eyes, that are oh! so deep, like dark wells, what I saw shining at the bottom of them was . . . was . . . Love."

"No, it was not," said Maisie with spirit. "You saw no such thing. And now I must beg of you to speak more sensibly, for I will not listen to anything of that kind." She spoke with an effort. His near presence, his magnetism affected her, though she struggled against it.

"It was love," he went on softly and unheeding. "The possibility of love. Do you know, it transformed you. You would not have recognised yourself. What a foolish little girl you are, with such a possibility before you to put it away. To-day you are young and lovely, but you will not be always young and lovely, and then you will grieve for the roses you did not gather when you might. You are asleep."

"Then let me sleep," said Maisie, with an accent that was half a prayer.

"Child," said the man, rising and standing by her, "you have all eternity for that. Now is the time for love and waking."

Maisie rose too, panting and agitated. To get away from him and his eyes was her only thought. As she stood up, however, he suddenly tried to draw her to him, but she dragged herself fiercely away. He caught her firmly round the waist and bent his head.

"How dare you?" she cried in revolt. "How dare you? I hate you!"

At this moment the door opened and Mr. Darracott was announced.

Maisie turned to him with a little laugh that was half a sob, as Scarlette quickly released her.

"Oh," she cried, unconsciously seizing Jack's arm, "I am so glad you have come, so glad."

"Why, what is the matter?" asked Darracott.

"Oh, nothing, but——" and Maisie began to cry.

"What does this mean?" asked Darracott, facing Scarlette with a face like a thundercloud.

"By what right do you enquire?" asked the latter.

"By the right of my friendship for Miss Carter and her family, and of my . . . my knowledge of you."

"Oh, make him go, make him go," sobbed Maisie.

"You hear," said Darracott, "you had better leave."

"Not at your command," said the other angrily.

"If you don't go at once," said Darracott, the veins in his forehead swelling ominously, "I'll make you."

Scarlette looked at him contemptuously. He was the taller and stouter man.

"Go," said Darracott, opening the drawing-room door.

The other stood still, smiling.

"Then out with you," said Darracott, "and learn what prison has not taught you; to abstain from insulting a girl whose shoes you are not fit to clean."

As he spoke he seized Scarlette in a grasp of iron, and before that smiling gentleman knew what had happened, he was standing bareheaded on the pavement outside, while Jack Darracott tossed his hat and cane after him into the gutter.

CHAPTER XII

THE ATHENE CLUB AND ITS MEMBERS

On Wednesday afternoons the members of the Athene Club receive their friends. The Athene is a mixed club which numbers amongst its habitués men and women of all kinds engaged in public work, whether social, political, literary, or artistic. To belong to it one must have done something, or at least must aspire to do something in the future. Though open to both sexes, the majority of its frequenters are women. It is, on the whole, a friendly, pleasant meeting-place; so its Wednesdays are popular.

On the particular Wednesday that Maisie had an unwelcome visitor Mrs. Golightly Carter had come down, bringing with her as guests Mrs. de Prazza and her American acquaintance Mrs. Shortland Dobbs. The latter had come to meet one of the members, a gentleman who made a living by tracing pedigrees for the inhabitants of the United States.

When Mrs. Carter arrived the rooms were already crowded, and as she seemed to know everybody her progress was constantly interrupted

by greetings from this side and that. Mrs. de Prazza speedily found some friends.

The Athene reception-room was charmingly furnished in tones of blue-grey, and in an alcove stood a life-size marble statue of the goddess. The members were broken up into groups. In one corner sat seven ladies engaged in the congenial task of abusing the committee, for every club has its body of irreconcilables who consider it the worst managed institution in the world, and grumble at not getting for five guineas advantages that would be cheap at ten.

"I can't get a cup of tea," said Mrs. Carter plaintively, as she joined a group, "and all the nice cakes are gone."

"That always happens," remaked Mrs. Gascoigne, a literary woman. "We lose too much time talking. Some of the regular habitués come early, so if you don't hurry up they carry off the best of everything."

"I wonder why it is that the regular habitués of most places are disagreeable?" said Mrs. Carter.

"Don't you think that habit and regularity somehow have a bad effect, especially on woman?" remarked Mrs. Gascoigne, smiling. "It is only disagreeable people who practise them when not obliged."

"Besides, folks get tired of people anyways," observed Mrs. Shortland Dobbs, "and feel like having a change, even if it be a change for the worse."

"Most people have a natural contempt for those that never refuse an invitation," said Mrs. Gascoigne.

"One likes an element of uncertainty in such matters," returned Mrs. Carter. "I know I do."

"I suppose it is the same sort of feeling that prompts one to hate people who take the full value out of things," said Mrs. Gascoigne. "By the way, here is a new member who seems anxious to take full value out of the club. She joined a fortnight ago she tells me, and she has been every day and all day since, studying the papers. I find she carries off *The Comet*, and sits on it to prevent anyone else seeing it. I wonder who on earth proposed her?"

Mrs. Golightly Carter turned, and her eyes fell on Miss Arethusa Jenkins.

"Oh, I believe I proposed her," she said in slight embarrassment. "She is a Miss Jenkins."

"Why on earth did you?" asked Mrs. Gascoigne. "Surely we have as many oddities as we require."

"She asked me, and I did not like to refuse. Miss Skuse seconded her. They are great friends."

There was no time for more, as Miss Jenkins was bearing down on the group with a wide smile.

"How are you, Mrs. Carter? Mrs. Heslop, is it not? I had the pleasure of being introduced to you last Wednesday. I hope you have not forgotten me."

"Oh . . . a . . . no," said Mrs. Heslop, who was a tall, fashionable-looking woman with beautiful hair of a natural golden-brown, and the ugly, red all-overish complexion that so often goes with it. "How are you, Miss Jenkins?"

"Quite well, thank you, and so busy. I am looking for a nice flat. We wish to move to a

better situation. I want it in a really good neighbourhood. Can you tell me of one likely to suit, of eight or ten fairly large rooms, about Park Lane or Piccadilly ? "

The conversation turned on flats. Miss Jenkins was very particular as to position. She intimated that her fashionable friends thought she had acted unwisely in choosing such a quiet place as her present abode, and went on to intimate that as she had brilliant prospects in the immediate future she thought it well to change.

" Good gracious ! " cried Mrs. Carter, smiling. " You are not going to be married, are you ? " She spoke jestingly.

Miss Jenkins bridled, simpered, and looked conscious.

" Who can have told you ? " she asked.

" No one," said Mrs. Carter truthfully. " I only fancied from what you said that perhaps——"

" Oh, dear, dear ! how dreadfully quick you are," said Miss Jenkins, with an affected laugh. " I am sure I said nothing that could have given you that impression. The whole thing is quite private as yet, and I do hope if you hear any rumours you will contradict them."

" Then you are engaged ? " said Mrs. Carter in surprise. " I'm sure I congratulate you."

" Oh no, please don't. You really mustn't," cried Miss Jenkins in adorable confusion. " It is just because my . . . my . . . fian . . . I mean because . . . er . . . a . . . friend of mine, who is a man in a very high position, a nobleman indeed, would probably, that is—does consider Camomile Street

too . . . er . . . suburban — that we think of changing. I contemplate going a great deal into society in future."

"What rent do you think of paying?" asked Mrs. Heslop with a practical air.

Miss Jenkins thought she would get something suitable for from forty to sixty pounds a year.

"I'm afraid," said Mrs. Heslop, "that for sixty pounds a year you are scarcely likely to find the accommodation you require in Park Lane."

"Do you really think not?" inquired Miss Jenkins. "Surely people would appreciate the advantage of having a gentlewoman of refinement as a tenant. My connection would be so good."

"Well," said Mrs. Heslop, "if you can find a London landlord who to secure a refined tenant will let a flat worth five hundred pounds a year for sixty pounds, you will have discovered a *rara avis*."

"Do you really think so?" asked Miss Jenkins again. "I fancy you must be mistaken. A friend of mine, a distinguished literary man, Mr. Archibald Durham, whom I have asked to come here some afternoon to tea, assures me that it will not be difficult. Are you acquainted with Mr. Durham?"

"No," said Mrs. Heslop and Mrs. Carter.

"Oh! he is so brilliant, so enthusiastic, full of the finest ideas, a man who ought to be Prime Minister, or Poet Laureate, or something like that."

"I have never heard of him," said Mrs. Gascoigne.

"Ah! as he himself says, there is a great deal of jealousy amongst literary workers. Many persons have tried to stifle his growing fame. However,

as I was saying, he told me that if he had a flat he would be glad, as a matter of business, to secure a gentlewoman of refined tastes on any terms. The average tenant, he says, is a soulless creature who just pays his rent."

"He doesn't always do that, unfortunately," said Mrs. Gascoigne.

"Mr. Durham considers that special terms ought to be exacted from the common herd for the benefit of men and women of exceptional gifts."

"Does the gentleman own real estate himself?" asked Mrs. Dobbs, who had met Miss Jenkins at Mrs. Carter's party.

"I don't know that he does exactly," said Miss Jenkins. "Of course he was speaking generally."

"It is ages since we saw you last, my dear Mrs. Heslop," said Mrs. Carter. "Where have you been?"

"At Monte Carlo chiefly, but we spent some of the time travelling about," said the lady in a deep voice.

Mrs. Carter gave a click.

"If I had only heard you were back in town," she said, "I'd have asked you for the fifteenth. We had a number of charming people. It was a most interesting occasion, quite special you know, and I am so sorry you missed it."

"Why? What was it?" asked Mrs. Heslop.

"Oh, that dear Claude Scarlette, you know. I gave a reception to congratulate him. It was actually proposed that he should be prosecuted. Such a dear. So interesting. A most charming young man."

"Prosecuted!" echoed Mrs. Heslop in surprise.

"Yes. Oh, I forgot. You have been away. He wrote a delightful volume of poems—a little improper of course, but such style—such melody, and he was shrieked at by some ridiculous people. They said he was corrupting public morals, as if the public had any morals to corrupt! So absurd. How can people be so narrow-minded? Everyone was reading the book, even the boys in the street. It was brought out in a cheap edition and tremendously advertised. I found our page absorbed in it one day, and I took it from him. The defence was grand. Mr. Scott spoke so splendidly of the purifying influences of art. The basest nature, he said, would be elevated by such literary expression. You really must meet Mr. Scarlette."

"I shall be very happy," said Mrs. Heslop in her big voice.

"Oh, by the way," said Mrs. Carter, sinking her tones. "It is so awkward. Lester simply hates the sight of him—said he wished the fellow—'the fellow' mind you—had got six years. When I spoke to him of the literary value of the book, he asked was it for its style that Timmins read it. He has turned quite Puritanical. Only yesterday he said Mr. Scarlette had intellect and no principle, and that intellect without principle was a diabolical force."

"What a shame," said Mrs. Heslop. "By the way, what is the name of the book?"

"*Eros and the Duchess.* Have you heard of it?"

"Good gracious! is that it? My sister-in-law

was speaking of it, and she thought it very shocking, but then she is very proper."

"To the pure all things are pure," said Mrs. Carter sententiously. "Don't you think so, Mrs. de Prazza?" turning to that lady, who had just come up.

"To the pure all things are embarrassing," replied Mrs. de Prazza.

Mrs. Heslop laughed.

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. Carter, "what am I thinking of? I quite forgot to introduce my friend Mrs. Shortland Dobbs, an American lady whom I have brought here to meet Mr. Shepheard. Mrs. Dobbs, you have heard me speak of Mrs. Heslop."

"Why, certainly," said Mrs. Dobbs.

"Is this your first visit to the Athene?" asked Mrs. Heslop.

"Yes, ma-am, it is."

"I hope you like it?"

"Oh, it is real nice. I'm just taking it all in. Mrs. Carter tells me gentlemen are admitted here as members, but I don't see vurry many 'raound. *Do* they join?"

"Quite a number belong to the Athene," replied Mrs. Heslop, "about a fourth of the total membership are men; but they do not always come to our Wednesday teas. Sometimes, however, we have several, but I do not know that the committee sufficiently encourages them to come."

"Strikes me," said Mrs. Dobbs, "that in this country, anyhaow, the men need a deal of encouragement. Mahn in the British Islands is

an animal both rare and shy—not what you'd call sociable."

"If you were an unfortunate London hostess you might say that," cried Mrs. Carter. "The creature has been so hunted that he has retired to his lair, and refuses to be drawn."

"In Amurrica," remarked Mrs. Dobbs, "a mahn thinks it a compliment to be invited. I guess he's glad of it."

"I wish he did over here," said Mrs. Carter. "Here he thinks it a compliment to come, though," plaintively, "goodness knows we try hard enough to amuse him. Don't you think it is difficult to get men to come to parties, Mrs. Gascoigne? I say man has been so hunted that he has retired to his lair."

"Then let him retire," said Mrs. Gascoigne, laughing. "Leave him alone for a while, and he will recover his native audacity. Men don't want women at everything, and they don't scruple to say so. We might take a leaf out of their book."

"You are too modern," said Mrs. Carter. "Too much of a New Woman. For my part I always have preferred, and always shall prefer, men to women."

"I'd sooner have a bright woman any day than a dull mahn," remarked Mrs. Dobbs, "and so we say in the States."

"You'll not find many Englishwomen to agree with you," said Mrs. Carter.

"No," said Mrs. Dobbs, "and p'raps that's why Englishmen marry Amurricans who don't set such store by them. Mahn despises to be

worshipped all the time. He knows he ain't a god, and after a spell, he somehow just wahnts to kick the worshipper. That's why you English-women have such a bad time for the most part, no lovers, no flowers, no candies. You bet, in the States it's the men do the worshipping. Over here, you spoil 'em. I know men. Show 'em you can do without them and they'll mostly come along right enough. Out West we used to have parties for girls only. Naow here that idea would never catch on. You wahnt men 'raound all the time, and take it as *a* favour if they come, but it doesn't chop any frost for you."

"But don't you like the society of men?" asked Mrs. Carter.

"Why, certainly, but the more you seem to wahnt it, the less you 'most always get of it. Make the men like *your* society. You Britishers air too eager. Try to enjoy yourselves some without them."

"But people would think it so dull and unattractive if there were no men at a party."

"Wa-al," said Mrs. Dobbs, "of course if you set a premium on having men-folk, and there ain't enough to go raound, you must expect some of them to get too big for their boots. It's your own fault."

"For myself," said Mrs. Heslop, "I prefer a mixture."

"So do I," said Mrs. Gascoigne; "we all do, and it's quite natural. I'd sooner talk any day to a clever man than to a clever woman, for I know pretty well what she thinks, but I don't so well know what he thinks. At the same time, I'd never agonise

to gather in stoopid or indifferent men just for the look of the thing. The pity of it is that women so seldom take pains to please each other."

"We are painfully in the majority," remarked Mrs. Carter. "There's no getting over that."

"Why, certainly," said Mrs. Dobbs. "Since that can't be helped, don't pretend to know it. It is all the more reason for making a corner and holding up values."

"That may do very well in America. You have more men there."

"You air in error," said Mrs. Dobbs. "Men have grown scarce enough in the older States, but we keep up the traditions of the good times when we were at *a* premium. It's *a* bluff, of course, but it answers."

"But don't the men see through it?" said Mrs. Carter.

"Men never do see through anything," said Mrs. Dobbs, "unless *a* woman is ugly, or they're tired of her."

"They love or hate us not for what we are, but for what we look," said Mrs. Gascoigne.

"I reckon," observed Mrs. Dobbs, "that the woman who is better than she looks don't get much credit for her virtues in this world."

"The plain woman makes an initial mistake in being born," said Mrs. Carter.

"And suffers for it all her life," said Mrs. Gascoigne. "It's a sort of original sin."

"Wa-al," said Mrs. Dobbs, "it's funny how set men air on looks. Sometimes 'board a steamer or *a* train, or *a* street car, I stare round at them and

think as a body they're just too homely for anything. You see men with no chins, and men with no noses, and men with big noses, and men with red noses, and men with bad complexions, and men all off on top, and hairy men, and men with big feet, and men with lines, and wrinkles, and bags under their eyes. What queer women they'd make, yet every one of them would despise to marry a wife no better looking than himself. Considerin' all things, I look for men to be modest. A handsome young mahn may reasonably demand a handsome young woman, but why a plain mahn shouldn't think a less plain woman good enough, beats me."

"'A man's a man for a' that,' is the women's motto," said Mrs. Carter.

"It is not as important for women to marry nowadays as it used to be when I was a girl," said Mrs. Heslop. "So many take up professions, and all that."

"Work is wholesome, I don't deny it," said Mrs. Carter, "but it is shockingly unbecoming, and I never yet saw one of my sex with whom compulsory work agreed."

"See, too, how little they earn," remarked Mrs. Gascoigne. "It takes nearly as much cleverness for a woman to make three hundred pounds a year as for a man to make three thousand."

"Three hundred pounds," said Mrs. Shortland Dobbs. "That's fifteen hundred dollars, ain't it? I should say it was not vurry many that can make three hundred pounds in this country."

"No," responded Mrs. Gascoigne. "Mediocrity

is as common amongst women as amongst men, and it's not as well paid."

At this juncture a little dark gentleman entered.

"Here is Mr. Shepheard," said Mrs. Heslop.

Mr. Shepheard was a man who had given much joy in his time to worthy dealers in dry goods, Wall Street brokers, iron magnates, and other persons with money to spare, for he made an excellent living by providing genealogies for those who were not unduly critical as to links in a chain of circumstantial evidence. He started with the pleasing assumption that all those who consulted him as to their ancestors came of whichever family of the same or an approximate name was highest in rank. This method invariably gave satisfaction. To discover that a man's great-grandfather had been an Irish peasant or an English artisan would afford no gratification to the individual concerned. No democratic inhabitant of the United States would think such information worth paying for. He would be humiliated by the revelation, as it is an understood thing that those who move in the plutocratic circles of New York and Chicago are the rightful heirs to the chief European titles. Mr. Shepheard's researches, therefore, naturally tended to prove that persons of the baser sort who crossed the Atlantic must have died without issue, while others of noble birth populated the country. This method was simple, straightforward, and eminently satisfactory to all the parties concerned. It also spared Mr. Shepheard much wear and tear in looking up pedigrees.

"Mr. Shepheard!" cried Mrs. Carter, "I'm so

glad you've come. I want so much to introduce you to my friend, Mrs. Shortland Dobbs of Shapira City, New York State, who is anxious to consult you professionally. Mrs. Dobbs——"

"Shortland," interjected the little lady.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Shortland Dobbs, this is Mr. Shepheard, the celebrated genealogist."

"I'm real glad to meet you, sir," said Mrs. Shortland Dobbs. "I've come over to Eu-rope largely with *a* view of looking up my geneology. I married my own first cousin. We air believed to come of a vurry ancient fam'ly. My momma, she always said so. Now, can you tell me anything about it? I understand we came originally from England."

"I shall be most happy to place myself at your disposal," said Mr. Shepheard. "Can you—a—give me any more precise information as to the ancestor who came from England? It would be of considerable assistance to me in my researches."

"Wa-al, no; I can't," said Mrs. Dobbs candidly. "I thought you'd do that."

"Have you any family papers you could let me see?"

"I reckon our fam'ly papers were destroyed," said Mrs. Dobbs, "for we haven't got any, but I'm sure we were of real good fam'ly. You see I've got small hands and feet, and my momma always said they were *a* sure sign of blue blood. Now, ain't they?"

"No doubt, no doubt," said Mr. Shepheard politely, "but I fear we shall require something rather more—a—documentary—to go upon."

"Why, I thought you'd be able to tell me right away who we were," said Mrs. Shortland Dobbs in a tone of disappointment. "Aren't there any of the British ar-istocracy named Dobbs? You ought to know."

"Dobbs, Dobbs," repeated Mr. Shepheard meditatively. "I cannot at this moment recall. I'm afraid not."

"Wa-al, I am discouraged," said Mrs. Shortland Dobbs. "But no doubt you know best, and so it's no use going into *the* matter that I can see."

"Wait a moment, my dear madam," cried Mr. Shepheard hastily. This was not at all what he wanted. "These questions take time. I must reflect. One cannot answer straight off in affairs of this nature. They require research—arduous research. You must know that though I cannot at this moment recall any noble family of the name of Dobbs, it by no means follows that one does not exist. It—a—moreover it has not unfrequently happened in my experience that when a member of an aristocratic house migrated to the New World, he changed his patronymic. That may well have been the case in this instance. The name of your ancestor may not have been Dobbs at all."

"Do tell! And what do you think it likely was?"

"Let me see. Dobbs—Dobbs! Well—a—it might have been—a—Nobbs."

"Might it naow? And are there members of the British ar-istocracy of the name of Nobbs?"

"Well—a—not precisely. . . . But, as probably you are aware, in the vulgar tongue a 'Nob' signifies an aristocrat, a person of distinction. Working on this line, my dear madam, no doubt we shall arrive at—a—satisfactory results. Besides it may possibly prove to be a mispronunciation or adaptation of some better-known appellation."

"I do like to hear you converse," said Mrs. Shortland Dobbs. "You use such superior language. But say, Mr. Shepheard, what do you think it could have been mispronounced or adapted from?"

"Well," replied Mr. Shepheard, very much nonplussed, and wishing himself well away, "Dobbs might be a variation of — of — of Daubs, or," with a burst of inspiration, "it might be a contraction of D'Aubigny, an old French name of the first importance. The D'Aubignys were peers of France, and belonged to the highest nobility."

"Do tell!" cried Mrs. Dobbs radiantly. She paid attention only to the conclusions, and did not heed the mental process by which her new acquaintance arrived at them. "Say, Mr. Shepheard, you're a real smart mahn! Now you just look it all up, an' see if some of those Daubs—Daubignys did not go to the States. I always did know we came of noble race—but I want it set down plain for folks to see. Sakes! won't some of them be mad in Shapira City. You fix it up for me, Mr. Shepheard, on your own terms. You'll have no reason to find fault with

me. There's no title, is there, I could claim? I'm not a baroness, am I? Do tell?"

"I'm afraid not," said Mr. Shepheard with an accent of profound regret.

"My! That is a pity. It would have been real lovely to find I was a baroness. Two friends of mine, Mrs. Willie K. Bruce, and Mrs. Hiram P. Plant, both of Shapira City, Noo York State, came over to Europe last fall to see who their husbands' ancestors were. Mrs. Bruce, she found that Willie was de-scended straight from what's-his-name Bruce, the man with the spider—it sounds old and musty, don't it?—and Mrs. Plant proved that the Plants were Plantagenets o-riginally. It made a great impression, sir, in Shapira City, I assure you—not that I know quite what Plantagenets air—so I'd like to be a countess anyways, if it can be managed."

"I'm afraid—a—very much afraid it cannot," said Mr. Shepheard. "But stay—'Shortland'! That name surely! My dear madam, there was an English king who is known in history as 'Lackland.' Now it is obvious to the meanest capacity that to 'lack' land is to be 'short' of land, and I am not unprepared to find after profound research that the two names may not have a common origin."

Mrs. Shortland Dobbs beamed.

"An English king!" she exclaimed. "Why, that is just too lovely for anything. Say, Mr. Shepheard, you're real intelligent. I have no use for a slouch in this business. I like *a* bright mahn. You'll fix it up splendid. That I see.

Do you start the researching at once, and I'll foot the bill. That king, by the way, when did he live ? "

" He began to reign in 1199, signed Magna Charta in 1214, and died in 1216."

" Did he so ? Do tell. In 1199 ! That is a long time ago, sir. Say, were there any Plantagenets around then ? "

" Oh yes, King John was himself a member of the Plantagenet family."

" Was he naow ? And the Plantagenets, I surmise, were a consid'rable fam'ly ? "

" They were," assented Mr. Shepheard gravely.

" I must read it all up," said Mrs. Shortland Dobbs. " I reckon it will be in some of your books ? "

" Undoubtedly. You will find mention of the Plantagenets in every History of England."

" Wa-al, I swan ! And so his name was King John. Why, my mother's father's name was King—John King. Ain't that just wonderful ! Naow, if John was a Plantagenet, the Plants and us are cousins 'way back. I must write and tell Maimie. She is a leader of our highest soci'ty in Shapira City—and she don't give other folks a show on the point of fam'ly. That Robert Bruce, was he alive then ? When John King—I mean King John signed Mag—Mag . . . What did you say he signed ? "

" Magna Charta. No, he was not born until many years later. He began to reign in 1306."

" Sakes ! I am glad. Won't Hattie Bruce be wild ! I must let her know. I'm real pleased

to have met you, sir. Must you go? Well, don't you forget my address—Hotel Ceecil. Be sure and come to see me. I'm mostly at home Fridays, but if you trace out any more, come right away. You can wire beforehand. I s'pose it will have to be written out?"

"Certainly, my dear madam," replied Mr. Shepheard. "Everything shall be done according to rule and precedent. When I have completed my researches, which will probably extend over some weeks, and may involve a journey to France to look up the D'Aubigny line, I will draw up a pedigree in proper form. Now I fear I must be going. You will soon hear from me."

"Mind you spare no expense," said Mrs. Shortland Dobbs. "I want this done in style."

"You may depend on me," replied Mr. Shepheard, and with mutual compliments they parted.

Mrs. Shortland Dobbs turned to seek Mrs. Golightly Carter. She found that lady still engaged in animated conversation, and as it was now nearly seven the little American took her leave. As she gained the hall she met Miss Arethusa Jenkins.

"Oh, are you going?" exclaimed the latter.

"I reckon I am," said Mrs. Dobbs.

"Do you mind my walking part of the way with you?" asked Miss Jenkins. "It is awkward for a girl to go about by herself in the Strand."

"Why, certainly," said Mrs. Dobbs, who was quite prepared to believe that in England every unmarried woman had a chaperon, whatever her age might be. "I shall be real pleased to have

your company. I'm staying at the Hotel Ceecil. Is that in your direction ? "

"Oh yes," responded Miss Jenkins graciously.

The two ladies set off together; Mrs. Dobbs secretly marvelling at the strange conventions of the Old World.

CHAPTER XIII

MRS. DOBBS AND MISS JENKINS TAKE A WALK

"It was real inter-resting at the Athene," remarked Mrs. Dobbs as she walked to her hotel with Miss Jenkins. "That Mr. Shepheard is just too lovely for anything. He says I am descended from an English king who lived 'way back hundreds and hundreds of years ago."

"How very gratifying," observed Miss Jenkins with reserve.

"He happened into the Club, and Mrs. Golightly Carter she intro-duced us. I have long been wanting to consult him about our fam'ly, and he gave me such information, I could hardly grasp it all. *A* smart mahn he is."

"I do not know him," replied Miss Jenkins. "Nor was I aware that in America you set any store by family, as the country is a Republic."

"Ah, but you air mistaken," cried Mrs. Dobbs. "In Amurrica we think a deal of fam'ly, and though we haven't yet got a regular ar-istocracy same as you, we have many most exclusive societies, such as the Daughters of the Rev'lution, and the Colonial Dames. All the best fam'lies of Eu-rope air to be found represented in the U-nited States."

"We, of course, are highly connected," said Miss Jenkins with a lofty air. "Our name was originally de Jenkynes, and we came over with William the Conqueror. My dear mamma's third cousin married a marquis. Through reverses such as befall persons of high descent we have been obliged to sell our ancestral estates, but I always feel that I belong by birth to the *haute monde*."

This speech impressed the little American very much. The grandiose style of her friend's conversation was just what she considered to be natural to a person laying claim to distinguished ancestry.

Miss Jenkins had a knowledge of high life that to Mrs. Dobbs seemed profound. It was not hampered in their conversations by strict regard for Burke or Debrett, for Mrs. Dobbs asked many questions, and it is annoying to have to admit one's ignorance, especially when talking to a person quite unable to check the accuracy of the reply. The information imparted by Miss Jenkins, being drawn entirely from the papers, was occasionally incomplete. Thus when she announced that Lady Margaret Wiggins and her husband had gone to Blank Castle for the shooting, and Mrs. Dobbs enquired with much interest who Lady Margaret might be, Miss Jenkins considered it preferable to answer promptly that she was the daughter of the Duke of Diddleums, and risk the statement, rather than lose the confidence of Mrs. Dobbs.

The result was that the American, though naturally shrewd, looked on Miss Jenkins as an authority, as a person of great politeness and social

distinction. True, she saw that Arethusa was ill-dressed, and had gathered that she was not wealthy. But the national contempt she might on that score have shared for her, was balanced by respect for one who talked so familiarly of great people, and she knew that in matters of clothing English people had a standard different from her own.

On the other hand, Mrs. Shortland Dobbs was an acquisition to Miss Jenkins. She was rich and generous, given to suggesting ices and drives in the Park, for both of which she paid. Moreover, it is pleasant to see that we impress others, and Mrs. Dobbs was visibly impressed by her recent acquaintance—for she was still new to England and to English social life.

"My dear Miss Jenkins, Mr. Shepheard not only tells me we come of a real ar-istocratic stock, with kings and all that for our ances-tors, 'way back, but he thinks that we have territorial rights which I can claim."

"Indeed?" said Miss Jenkins politely.

"It is so. I regret that I do not know enough of your British laws to say exactly what territorial rights are, nor am I sufficiently acquainted with your history to put it all before you as he put it before me, but it was fine. Unfortunately where I was raised we did not have the advantages of *a* college education. We always thought our fam'ly was out of the common, but it is real nice to have our o-pinion confirmed. I do ad-mire your British ar-istocracy. They air so refined. Not that I set store by the priv'leges of rank. We do not have

these false distinctions in our country. At the same time I have come to Eu-rope to see all that is to be seen, and if you can pre-sent me to any members of your ar-istocracy, I shall esteem it a favour, especially as I now find I b'long to them by birth."

"Certainly, I shall be very happy," murmured Miss Jenkins, wildly searching the recesses of her mind for any available person of rank. "As I have just mentioned, our own family is highly connected. I may tell you frankly, but in confidence, that before very long it is possible that I myself may be united to a nobleman of large fortune."

"My!" exclaimed Mrs. Dobbs. "This is real inter-resting. I thought when we first met you said you were engaged to a clergyman."

"There was a clergyman who sought to win my affections," said Miss Jenkins, with slight embarrassment. "But I rejected him. Such a union was not suitable for me. I can aspire to something higher. Of course at present nothing is really *settled*. Please don't think it is. When it comes to the point, I may not be willing. I will never sell myself for rank or riches, however much he may urge me."

"Take my advice and marry him," said Mrs. Dobbs. "Don't you chuck away your chances like that. A woman is better off with a mahn to take care of her. I've been real lonely myself since Shortland Dobbs died. If you get the offer of *a* nobleman, don't you fool around an' miss your chance. Is he fond of you?"

"Very," said Miss Jenkins modestly. She could say no less.

"You air lucky," said Mrs. Shortland Dobbs a trifle enviously. "What are his name and rank? Do tell."

"That," said Miss Jenkins after some hesitation, "must remain a secret for the present."

"How ro-mantic. Say then, have his haughty parents objected?"

"Oh no, not at all. They—in fact, they are *de*lighted at the prospect of such an alliance for their son."

Mrs. Shortland Dobbs was a little disappointed. She had hoped it would have been more like a novel. In those she had read the haughty parents always did object, and were frustrated in the end. She hated their cold and cruel ways.

"You air lucky," she repeated. "It is the ambition of my life to marry a British ar-istocrat. I have been *a* widow for five years, and in Shapira City they all say I ought ter marry again. I could have 'most any of our men if I lifted my finger. There's Ohio K. Stebbings, the great Wall Street broker, he's just wild about me, but I've no use for Ohio. Then there's Peter L. Flopp, our biggest dry goods mahn, and Watson Vanderdecken, who owns railway stock, and a lot more. I was real young when I married Mr. Shortland Dobbs. He was a sight older than me, and he left quite *a* nice income. Naow I feel like marrying to please myself."

"Quite right," approved Miss Jenkins. "I too am very difficult to please. So few men are worthy

of a girl's trust and affection. So few realise one's ideal. So few fulfil the expectations of a fastidious nature."

"Say, don't you be too high-toned, all the same," advised Mrs. Shortland Dobbs, "or you'll get left, certain. There air no angels about, and if there were, I reckon they wouldn't marry women."

Miss Jenkins smiled a superior smile, and did not argue the point.

"I haven't met many British ar-istocrats yet," went on Mrs. Shortland Dobbs meditatively, "'cept old Lady Pringle and Sir Thomas Turtle, who is a mar-ried mahn, an' that lovely Lord Adolphus. But I think I will get myself presented at your Court, and when Mr. Shepheard has fixed up about my pedigree, I shall no doubt take up my position amongst *the* highest. Naow as you are a friend of mine, I reckon you will stand by me; and when this grand engagement of yours is made public I will donate you just the sweetest wedding-present I can find."

"How very good of you," murmured Miss Jenkins.

"Not a bit of it. If you help me, I'll help you. But here we are at the Ceecil. Just you come right in and dine with me. The cooking is fair."

As Mrs. Shortland Dobbs removed her bonnet she could not help thinking how fortunate Miss Jenkins was.

"I'm younger than she is," she reflected, "an' miles better looking, an' better dressed, an' I've got money, an' they do say the British ar-istocracy like Amurricans. Naow if she's going to marry a

nobleman, why in creation shouldn't I ? I reckon I've as good a chance any day, 'specially naow that it's a'most fixed we come of good people, though we *did* make our money in hogs."

Thus meditating she moved with Miss Jenkins to the dining-room.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FATE OF *THE BALMORAL MAGAZINE*

MR. DURHAM, as we have indicated, entered proudly into possession of *The Balmoral Magazine*. He revelled in his editorial powers. He expanded with pride and joy, talked more about 'Literature' with a big L than ever, and treated his subordinates with unexampled ferocity. He was lofty, satirical, unapproachable. He planned a scheme for the reform of taste in literature, to be worked out in *The Balmoral*, the first part consisting of an analysis of literary taste in general, the second of an exposure of current taste, showing the points of divergence between the correct and the vulgar standards, and the third of a series of masterly excerpts from his own writings, calculated to inspire the most grovelling reader and to lead him to higher things. Unfortunately, before the grovelling reader could be reformed it was necessary that he should read what *The Balmoral Magazine* said; and this he obstinately declined to do. That he was offered good value for his money could not be doubted, since of the fourteen items that went to make up the magazine, twelve were from the pen of Mr. Durham, the serial included. Not,

of course, that he put his name to all of them. Carrying out the plan suggested long ago to Mrs. Durham, he varied his signature; to some articles he placed his initials, to others his pseudonym of 'Archie Gordon,' and only four were signed in full. Of the two remaining contributions, one, a short story having no particular beginning or ending, and entitled 'A Maiden's Romance,' was from the pen of Miss Arethusa Jenkins, who selected herself as her own heroine, but escaped recognition by describing herself as beautiful and fascinating. The other was taken bodily from an American paper. It was a proud day for Miss Jenkins when she saw her name in print. She bought dozens of copies, sent them marked with blue pencil to everyone she knew, and took every opportunity of mentioning her "literary work," so that she greatly astonished and impressed her relations, who had always thought her rather a fool, and now began to wonder whether there were not something in her after all. She lost no time in forwarding the number to the Rev. Augustine L'Estrange, and felt herself to be on the high-road to fame. Valuable, however, as were her contributions, and, more especially, her purchases, to Mr. Durham, *The Balmoral Magazine* could not, unfortunately, be sustained on these alone, and the only other person who bought a copy was Mr. Durham's brother-in-law. Even a magazine that has no cash to pay for contributions must lay down something, if but a trifle on account, towards printing. A formidable hole was made in the petty cash by the outlay

for stamps needful in sending the magazine to the principal papers in the English-speaking world for review. That the reviews were mostly unfavourable only roused the fighting spirit in Mr. Durham. He declared that it was what he had expected. He knew the ignorance, spite, and jealousy of the press, the difficulty with which it acknowledges a master in style. He would storm the stronghold of these people, push them from their throne, and expose them to the world. He was proud of being attacked by them. Their censure was praise. He even quoted it.

Despite such powerful recommendation, the public still remained obdurate. The number of returns equalled the number of copies sent out. The second month neither Miss Jenkins nor Mr. Grogan were purchasers. Still, Mr. Durham was not disheartened. As he said, if he could only get at the great public he was confident of success; he knew he could win and hold it. To this end he devised many plans, that all came to naught. He loitered round bookstalls where his bantling was exposed for sale, saw man after man pick it up, glance through it, and put it down, passing on to some rival publication of inferior merit. How they could resist its charms he did not know, except on the supposition that those persons he chanced to observe possessed the degraded literary taste against which he ardently protested. He went so far as occasionally to pick it up himself and say to a stranger 'Excellent magazine this,' but the latter simply replied 'Do you think so?' and bought something else.

He even wrote its name on slips of paper torn from his pocket-book, and passed them to fellow-travellers by train or omnibus with a strong recommendation to purchase it.

When the third issue of the magazine appeared, the number containing Mr. Durham's famous epic poem of six thousand five hundred lines on the County Council, and matters were no better, he could stand the state of things no longer. It was shocking, an indelible disgrace to contemporary intellect that work of such interest should be overlooked. Mr. Durham had made the poem his *pièce de résistance* under the conviction that its appearance would at once work a change in the fortunes of *The Balmoral*, would send up its circulation by leaps and bounds, and not improbably sell out the edition. Alas! it came, was seen, and did not conquer. He called on all the booksellers with a view to urging them to encourage the sales. They protested that it was impossible, as there was no demand for the magazine, and they could not force people to buy. He retorted that it was to their supineness that the lack of demand was owing. His conviction was that they stood in with the publishers of inferior periodicals, and were determined to boycott a publication likely to interfere with these. They retorted angrily, and refused to supply the magazine in future except when specially ordered, so that poor Mr. Durham found himself with several quarrels and an enormous number of copies on hand.

At last things came to a crisis. There was absolutely no demand for *The Balmoral Magazine*, and

from the financial standpoint this was unsatisfactory. In addition, Mr. Durham felt keenly how hard it was on the nobler section of the public to be deprived of a literary feast through the action of a jealous and incompetent clique. Accordingly he braced himself for a bold move. Neatly, if rather shabbily dressed, with his frock-coat tightly buttoned across his manly chest, wearing a top-hat, well-brushed boots and new tan gloves, he sallied forth from the office, bearing suspended round his neck by a strap a leather satchel filled to overflowing with copies of the magazine. He took up his stand in Fleet Street, a sufficiently remarkable figure amongst vendors of smallwares, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing himself the centre of a crowd. This he addressed, telling the people that his aim and object as a literary man was to bring first-class literature within reach of everyone. He made quite a little speech on the hardship to the humble working-man of having, between the consumer and the producer, middlemen whose sole idea was to make a profit for themselves. To the poet, gain was no attraction, but he longed to move and thrill the souls of his brother men. To this end he, Mr. Durham, had resolved to-day to cast aside conventions, to come and meet the great public face to face, and offer copies of his magazine at an unparalleled sacrifice. Though published originally at eighteen-pence, and cheap at the money, he was prepared to sell it for the ridiculous sum of sixpence. The crowd, which had listened so far with interest, and some of whose members had thrust out eager hands for the magazine

held towards them, no sooner learned that there was sixpence to pay than it began to melt away. After a few such experiences Mr. Durham, with words of bitter scorn, reduced the price to threepence. Even at this preposterously low figure there were no purchasers. A few looked at the publication, shook their heads and handed it back. By four o'clock in the afternoon Mr. Durham had come down to one penny. At this figure he sold eight copies and no more, until at last, growing desperate, and determined under no circumstances to return home with his satchel full, he proceeded to give them away. Everyone who passed was now eager to see what he offered, so that in a very few minutes his satchel was empty. He went back, indignant with mankind, ashamed of a generation so indifferent to English Literature, so demoralised by popular writers, so incapable of appreciating him; yet rejoicing to think that he had, even at a sacrifice, sown that day the seeds of his fame, which, rooted in the heart of the people, would yet spread and blossom into a tree whose branches would overshadow the whole earth.

CHAPTER XV

FATHER AND LOVER

JACK DARRACOTT had an agreeable sense of elation, a feeling that things were going well with him, that the tide had turned, and that whatever he undertook just now was bound to prosper.

Having attracted public attention by the Matrimonial Competition, *The Comet* seemed likely to make a serious reputation. Darracott's brilliant articles, which formerly no one ever saw, were now commented on and quoted, with acknowledgments by the leading papers. A discussion started by Hazlitt on Social Ethics promised to start a lengthy correspondence. The circulation had increased tenfold. Advertisements were pouring in. Altogether *The Comet* had begun to go with a rush. Jack remembered, with a certain grudge, the work he had done in the past, that had been absolutely fruitless, while now, by a turn of the wheel, a mere lottery, a chance suggestion, was bringing him money and success. His circumstances, however, were too pleasant, and he was still too young a man to think with bitterness of the situation. He accepted the good that fell in his

way as an earnest of more to come. He felt encouraged, stimulated.

His pulses beat full and joyously. They throbbed one name. "With her by my side I might yet do great things," he mused one Sunday afternoon as he walked towards Hyde Park Corner. "I feel it in me. Hitherto the petty worries, the petty needs, the strain of earning a bare existence have fretted my life away. All this will now be at an end, and if only I can hold myself in hand, can repress this natural, eager desire to live, and enjoy, and waste my time, I may do good work. She would help me, would give me a motive for exertion. Thanks to this absurd competition, I shall enter on a life of quite different temptations. Hitherto I have plodded on sternly, sturdily, at uncongenial toil. The effort has been to keep my soul serene, to rise above petty cares, to refrain from whining at misfortune, to do the best I could, and to let the rest slide. Now what I have longed for is almost in my hand; and I may run the risk of neglecting the work I have set myself to do.

"Oh, to live, to live, after these years of repression and sorrow! When I think of the thousand humiliations, deprivations, inconveniences, delays, and discomforts I have had to endure, solely because of my poverty; the hardships, the slights, the impertinences, I could go mad with joy to think that they are over. While a man is poor, no one believes in his powers. Mediocrities treat him as a mediocrity. The world, like the School Board, pays by results. It recognises success alone, never

the possibilities of success. Yes, poverty is soul-destroying—but riches may be soul-stifling."

He almost ran into Mr. Golightly Carter, who was coming in the opposite direction.

"Hallo, Darracott!" cried the latter cheerily. "Where are you off to? Why, man, you look as if you'd dropped from the clouds."

"So I have," said Darracott with a laugh. "I was in a brown study, and I'm off to no place in particular. It is such a lovely morning I could not stay indoors, and I thought it possible I might meet you."

"Right you are! Then come with me. Maisie and her mother have gone to the Church Parade, and bound me by solemn oaths to join them under a certain tree, our usual trysting-place when we get separated."

"With all my heart," said Darracott, and the two men turned into the Park, still fresh with green of early summer, the more vivid for recent rain. The air was like a bath of sunshine, the sky deep blue with flecks of white cloud, the flower-beds gleamed like jewels. A soft wind rustled through the trees. In their shadow groups of pretty girls passed up and down, criticised by rows of seated on-lookers. There was something intoxicating in it all, the warmth, the verdure, the delicate perfume, the bright faces, the dainty, rustling skirts, the laughter, the chatter. Hitherto Darracott had felt himself aloof, somehow, from all this. He had had hard and stern work to do in the world, he had set himself to carve out a career, a competence. The career was still to make, but the competence

was within grasp, and this knowledge altered his view of the gay idlers around. He no longer felt impatient of them. On the contrary, their irresponsibility charmed him, and he longed, for the time at least, to be like them.

"So *The Comet* has achieved a big success," said Mr. Carter. "I congratulate you. You made a plucky fight against heavy odds, and if ever a young fellow deserved to prosper it is you."

"Thanks awfully," said Jack. "I think we have turned the corner at last. It has been an uphill fight, but now the paper has had a big 'ad.' and it ought to go."

"Why, it's booming, man. Everyone is talking of it. What a lucky idea that queer competition was."

"It is rather intoxicating," said Jack, "to have all one hoped for come within measurable distance. The hardship to me, in these years of struggle to make a bare living, has been the feeling that if I only had money I could have moved the world,—my own little world, of course."

He coloured at his own words, and pursued shamefacedly—

"That sounds shockingly egotistical. I don't mean it, but I had in me an enormous fund of energy and wanted the lever to apply it. Don't think I imagined myself a neglected genius or anything like that, only I had deep down a conviction that I could and would come to something if I got the chance."

"I have every faith in you," said Mr. Carter.

"Some of your work seems to me really remarkable, but perhaps poverty is a better stimulus than riches; though if money doesn't damn a man it does him a lot of good."

"I won't let it damn me," said Jack. "Is that Miss Carter over there, in pink, with her back to us?"

"No, very like her, though. She has a white frock on to-day. We are not near them yet. They are by the fourth tree in this direction from the Achilles statue. You and she are very good friends, are you not?"

"About that I want to speak to you," said Jack, with some embarrassment. "Hitherto I have been such a poor beggar I haven't liked to say anything, but now things have seemingly taken a turn I cannot hold my tongue any longer. The fact is, Mr. Carter—you must have seen, you may have noticed—that—that I love Maisie with all my heart and soul. I believe, indeed I'm sure, that she does not know it, but do you think there is,—there may be any chance for me?"

Mr. Carter was a long time silent, so that Darracott at last glanced at him nervously. The elder man's eyes were fixed on the ground, and he dug into it with his cane as he walked along. At last he spoke.

"I'm glad to hear you say so. To be frank with you, I have been hoping for this. There is not a man I've ever met to whom I'd sooner give my little girl, and I think, considering the sort of blue china and Baudelaire youths my wife draws round her, Maisie is lucky to have chanced on

you. That child," he choked a little, "is the apple of my eye, and her happiness is the only thing I live for. However, though she tells me pretty well everything, and I know she likes you very much, I don't in the least know if the feeling goes deeper than that."

"Maisie is so young," said Jack. "She does not know what love is."

"I am afraid," said her father, "Maisie is not of the ordinary marrying sort, who are bound to fall in love with the first man who pays them attention. Two or three of the young men who come to our house have tried to make themselves agreeable to her. I see more that goes on than I pretend to see, and I noticed that in the beginning she laughed at them, and treated all their compliments and pretty speeches just as a joke, but when they persevered and became serious she seemed to take a dislike to them. She has no taste for coquetry or showing off her conquests. She needs to be approached very delicately, and gradually, and by the right man."

"I have felt all this," said Jack. "I have never said a word to her that I might not have said to my sister. She is different, somehow, from other girls. I suppose it is her education."

"Partly that," said Mr. Carter, "and partly temperament."

"Why did Mrs. Carter send her to a convent?" asked Jack.

"It was my doing. I'm not a very religious fellow,—that is to say, I have no strong dogmatic convictions,—but I have come by degrees to hold

very firmly in the belief that there are good and evil in the world, that one is not the other, and we have to make our choice between them to the best of our ability; indeed, that we are in the world for that purpose alone. A pretty difficult thing it is at times to know which is which. Now I wanted my child to get the sort of training that would enable her to discern and choose; for our ideas are all mixed up. There seems with us to be nothing sure, nothing stable, nothing to hold by. One half our population thinks everything is sinful, while the other half thinks nothing sinful. So there you have in a nutshell my reason for sending Maisie to a convent. If it had drawbacks in some ways, I don't regret it, when I look at her like a flower amidst all those rakish old-young people, when I see her gay and natural, yet instinctively shrinking from all that is coarse or doubtful. And withal she is impulsive and warm-hearted, not in the least gloomy or ascetic. Letty tells me I've grown quite strict. She does not see the situation as I do. I tell you what, Darracott, it is astonishing how seldom mothers understand their girls. Theoretically, of course, mothers and daughters are all in all to each other. In real life, by some freakish fate, even when they are both good and well-meaning, their characters seldom harmonise; they rarely comprehend or view each other with real sympathy. A woman has most chance with her sons. They often have something of her in them, while once her daughters are over twelve they grow apart from her. I know it was so with my own mother, whom

we boys idolised. She never got on so well with my sisters."

"Do you think Maisie will have me? Do you think she likes me?" said Jack eagerly.

"She likes you certainly," said Mr. Carter: "but, as you say, I don't think the idea of love has ever entered her head, except impersonally. She has never brushed the down off her emotions, as a child brushes the down off the wings of a butterfly it has caught, and she is the better for it. Other girls begin giggling about men and talking of 'he' and 'him' before they are in long dresses."

"You do not give me much encouragement," said Jack, a little disappointed.

"I don't, and I am sorry. Upon my life I'd ask nothing better than to see her engaged to you; but— However, there's nothing like trying. You have my full and free consent to win her if you can. I'll cry 'Bless you, my children' in orthodox fashion if you succeed; and that girl, Darracott—though she is my daughter, I must say it—that girl is one in a thousand. She has a heart of gold! To see her perpetually trying to like all those people, and blaming herself when she can't succeed. Shows her innate common-sense, I say, that she can't."

"Forgive me for speaking frankly," said Jack, "but, thinking as you do, why didn't you choose friends for Mrs. Carter and yourself that would be also suitable for your daughter?"

"Laziness, my boy, I tell you—laziness, and moral cowardice, and my inveterate habit of

taking the line of least resistance. But it is a different thing now there is Maisie to consider. We spent the holidays with her abroad, in quiet places mostly, so that until she came home for good I never realised that she was a young woman, and a young woman of a stamp different from those girls my wife patronises."

"But have you not some old acquaintances, men like yourself, who have daughters?"

"Well, no; my friends are mostly old fogies. You see I lived all my early life abroad, where I made my money. I was not very young when I returned to England and married, and found people I used to know scattered to the four corners of the earth. Letty was a mere girl. She came of very straitlaced, absurd people, who before her marriage did not let her call her soul her own, and it delighted me to see her joy in her freedom. We knew no one else when we came to London, and she set about making acquaintances for herself. I was able to gratify her fancies, and let her do just as she liked, watching her as one might watch a child, and then, when I began to realise that it might be well to pull up, the thing was already done. Her character was formed. She had got into a groove and could not get out of it. Nor, to be candid, did I much want her to do so, until Maisie came home."

"Then Maisie was to you a sort of awakening process?"

"By Jove! she was. I never felt such responsibility before, and I don't like it. I'd be glad to shift it to your shoulders. Life is uncertain,

Darracott, life is uncertain, and I don't like to think of that child thrown on the world without her poor old Dad. I wish to God she were happily married to you."

"So do I," said Darracott.

CHAPTER XVI

JACK AND MAISIE

THEY reached the fourth tree from the Achilles statue, and there, with her mother and a little man who was tightly buttoned into a grey frock-coat, and had an orchid in his buttonhole, sat Maisie.

Jack's eyes followed her every movement. She wore a gown of some soft white stuff, with waistband of green into which was thrust a bunch of sweet-smelling lilies of the valley. Her shady white hat had similar green ribbons. She looked like a lily of the valley herself he thought, with her slender figure, delicately poised head and neck, and the background of verdure.

She rose with a certain air of relief when he and her father came in sight.

"Oh, do take me round to see the rhododendrons," she said, approaching them and holding out a slender white-gloved hand to Jack. Mrs. Golightly Carter always dressed her daughter with exquisite taste, and in effective contrast to herself. She was sufficiently young and pretty not to fear being outshone, as her style was so different. Her hair today was a bright mahogany red, her skin pale with powder, her vivid carmine lips were parted

over pearly white teeth. She looked a Jan van Beers' painting stepped out of its frame. Her scarlet parasol threw a becoming glow on her features, and she listened with interest to all her neighbour was saying, just glancing towards her husband and his companion with a friendly nod.

"The rhododendrons," said Mr. Carter. "Tired of sitting still, eh?"

"No," said Maisie, "not of sitting still," she sank her voice, "but oh, so tired of Mr. Medlicott."

"Well," said her father, "suppose you resign your chair to me and let Darracott take you. I can't walk for ever, like you young people, and I have no doubt he will have no objection."

"Delighted," said Jack, and he meant it. When he had paid his respects to Mrs. Golightly Carter and her companion, an old man about town, he turned into a by-path with Maisie, and she was soon standing in rapt admiration before a clump of flame-coloured flowers.

"You looked relieved to see us just now," said Jack.

"Did I?" asked Maisie. "I felt it. I do so dislike Mr. Medlicott. He is such a bore."

"I suppose he was telling you about his divorce case, was he not? Of how poor his wife was when he married her, and how she ran away."

"How did you guess?" said Maisie very low.

"Because he always does tell strangers, and I saw your face."

"Does he?" said Maisie with wide eyes. "How horrid of him! If such a—a—misfortune happened to anyone, I should have thought it would be a . . . a great grief . . . and shame, and sorrow, and that one couldn't talk of it like that to indifferent people."

"Medlicott is a good-natured old boy," said Jack with a smile. "Don't be too hard on him."

"Why can't he let me respect him then?" said Maisie. "I thought him a nice, kind old gentleman until to-day. I used to like old people until I came to London."

"And now you don't?"

"No, they don't seem to mind what they say. I suppose they're accustomed to queer things, and forget that others are not."

"It's just that," said Jack. "But let us put aside all these people. They don't matter in the long-run. Let us think of ourselves. Think what a lovely day it is, and how green the grass, and what a gorgeous blaze of colour these rhododendrons make, how pretty your white dress is, and be happy."

Maisie laughed.

"You're right," she said. "My temper has somehow gone wrong, and, as I told you before, I'm always taking dislikes to people, and then mother scolds me for being rude, for I can't hide my feelings. I often wish I were back at the convent."

"But what should we do without you here?" said Jack. "Your father would be heart-broken, not to speak of myself."

"Oh, you," said Maisie, laughing. "You'd soon get over it, but father—yes, he'd miss me." She spoke very tenderly.

"And don't you believe I'd miss you too?"

"I should be glad to think you would," said Maisie frankly. "You have been awfully good and kind to me, and patient with me, even when I've been impatient with myself, and I can really talk to you as a friend; but poor father, of course, it is quite different with him."

"How is it different with him?" asked Jack jealously.

"Well, you know, he is so fond of me, he spoils me, and he says I am all he has."

"Has it never struck you, Maisie, that I too may be fond of you, and that you may be all that I have?"

The earnestness of his tone astonished Maisie, who looked at him quickly. What she read in his face startled her, for she grew quite pale, and took a step backwards.

"Oh, Maisie!" he cried, and took her hands in his. He breathed heavily.

"Don't, don't!" she exclaimed, going from white to red. "What is the matter with you? You frighten me."

"I love you," he said hoarsely.

There was a moment's breathless silence, then Maisie, still looking at him with parted lips, drew

away her hands, fumbled blindly for her handkerchief and began to cry.

"Oh, don't, darling, for God's sake don't cry! I was a brute to startle you, but I couldn't help it," and he slipped his arm round her waist. There was not a soul in sight. "Tell me, Maisie, do you love me a little? Only say 'yes' and I shall be the happiest fellow in the world."

But Maisie sobbed on.

"Oh, Maisie, Maisie, why are you crying? What is it? Do you hate me? Speak to me. You break my heart," and he tried to draw her hands down.

"Oh no—yes—I don't know," sobbed Maisie. "I like you but you frighten me. I don't understand it."

"I don't want to frighten you, Maisie. I love you."

"I suppose you don't, but you do," said Maisie incoherently.

"Frighten you? How on earth do I frighten you? I don't mean to frighten you, my darling. Why should I? I'm just the same as I was yesterday, a week ago, and you were not frightened at me then."

"Oh, I don't know," said Maisie. "I suppose it's absurd; but you seem quite changed, you startled me dreadfully."

"Here, let us sit down and talk about it."

"Oh no: mother will be wondering where we are. Let us go back."

"Not she. She does not expect you back for

at least an hour, and Mr. Medlicott is still there, and I want you here, and you will have to stay."

Maisie resigned herself, and they seated themselves on a vacant bench round a quiet corner, where a clump of rhododendrons shut them out from view.

"How did I startle you, tell me, dear?"

"I can't," said Maisie very low. "You just frightened me. . . . You were different somehow! . . . You seemed strange . . . I . . . I didn't seem to know you."

"Now, Maisie," said Jack, "besides being my sweetheart,"—Maisie started and flushed,—"you are my dear little friend, and that you will remain whether you have anything more to do with me or not. Perhaps I spoke too soon, but, dear, remember nobody will force you to do anything that you don't like. If you do not love me, and you don't think you ever can, just tell me so, and I won't annoy you. You are quite free, and in any case I don't want you to answer straight off. Take time to think it over, to think of me as something more than a friend. Another girl would have seen it long ago, but you are very young, and you are not like other girls. Now, why are you frightened?"

"Well," said Maisie with difficulty, "I didn't think that you . . . you . . . that you . . . you . . . liked . . ."

"That I loved you?"

"And it seems to alter things. We were so

happy before . . . and . . . I do not want it . . . changed." She spoke with difficulty.

"And you never suspected all this time? Tell me."

"It flashed across me once," said Maisie hesitatingly. "The day you . . . you rid me of . . . that dreadful man, but I didn't really believe it. I told myself . . . it couldn't be true . . . that I . . . was a goose . . . and that it was only all this chatter the girls keep up about . . ." She stopped.

"About what, Maisie?" he asked, as she was silent.

"About love," she dropped her voice, "and lovers that put it into my head, and so I tried to put it out, and—and then, when you spoke to me just now . . . and looked at me . . . like that, somehow strangely, I felt all of a sudden it was true, and it . . . seemed . . . to make me grown up . . . old . . . all at once . . . and . . ."

"Well, go on; tell me what is in your mind."

"And you seemed so masterful, and I felt brought face to face with . . . with life . . . and . . . all sorts of possibilities . . . that I . . . I shrink from . . . and . . ."

"And what, Maisie?"

Maisie did not answer. She could not find words in this tumult of painful emotions.

"And you don't love me, Maisie?"

"No, I . . . I don't know . . . Oh, don't be angry, I'm so sorry. I didn't imagine love was like this. It can't be love, for that ought to make

one quite happy, and . . . and . . . I feel so frightened and miserable."

"I don't think love means happiness," said Jack slowly. "That is a delusion. It has made me wretched enough. Maisie, people don't love because it makes them happy, but because they can't help it. The happiness may come, or it may not. But you haven't told me yet why you are frightened. Was I too rough with you? too sudden?"

"N—no," breathed Maisie, "it isn't exactly that."

"Then why?" he persisted.

Maisie hesitated.

"Speak, dear."

"It . . . it frightens me to . . . to think that I have to choose . . . and—and . . . that you should mind so much . . . when after all it is only I . . . a girl . . . just Maisie Carter. . . . It is like . . . having to take my fate in my hands and . . ." She stopped.

"Maisie," said Jack very quietly, "I understand it all, better perhaps than you. Now listen to me, my pet, and do not be frightened any more." He took her hand, unbuttoned the long glove very gently, and stroked her white fingers with his palm for a time in silence.

"My dear," he said, "it is quite true. You are no longer little Maisie Carter, and you never will be again. You are grown up now, and you have, like every woman, to take your fate in your hand and choose for yourself. It is I who have done this, but it was inevitable that it should

be done some day and by someone. Better I, perhaps, than another. I can enter, I think, at least to a certain degree, into the feelings of a girl when she first realises that she is a woman and that a man wants her for his own with all his heart and soul . . . that is, for a girl like you. To some such things may be food for laughter, but, Maisie, you are right. It is something very serious that I ask, and it is yours to give or to withhold. Only if you think it will be for your happiness do I urge you to say 'yes.' I know you would make me happy beyond belief, but whether I can make you happy is another matter. Think it over, little Maisie. Be selfish about it. Don't let your knowledge of my need of you interfere. Women are so pitiful, they often give just because they are asked beseechingly. Now put me out of it; think of yourself. I don't say this without difficulty, dear. I'd like to plead with you, to show you how much you are to me, the light of my eyes, but I won't. It would not be fair. Unless you think you could be happy with me, far happier than ever you have been, unless you feel you want to leave your home for me and make your home with me, send me about my business. But if," his voice trembled—"if you think I might be to you what you are to me . . ."

There was a long passionate silence. Maisie felt his fingers tingling against hers, the full strokes of his pulse, the tenseness of his mood.

A lady-bird alighted on her white dress. She watched the creature with the intentness we devote to small objects in moments of emotional exalta-

tion. Was she happy or miserable? She scarcely knew, but at least she was no longer afraid. This was more the Jack she knew.

"Good gracious! where can they be?" cried Mrs. Carter's voice round the corner, as, accompanied by her husband, she paused on the other side of the rhododendrons. Mr. Medlicott had disappeared. "It is two o'clock. We shall be late for lunch."

For the moment Jack hated Mrs. Carter; she seemed to be for ever interrupting his conversations with Maisie.

Maisie jumped to her feet, as Jack seizing her hand pressed his lips to it. She hurriedly drew it away, and fumbled with the buttons.

Her mother, in a tone of relief, exclaimed, "Oh, here they are at last. Good gracious, Maisie, how hot you look, child! Hurry up. We are ever so late. Mr. Darracott, of course you will come home to lunch with us."

"I fear I cannot," said Jack. "I have an engagement. It is very kind of you to ask me. I will call soon."

He walked in silence by Maisie's side to the carriage, saw the ladies into it, and bade them good-bye. He tried to catch Maisie's eye, but she was looking down. Then he turned away, his whole nature shaken out of its habitual placidity. What Maisie's answer would be he could not divine.

As for Maisie, she drove home as if in a dream. Her chief feeling was of fright. She never would see him again. She trembled from head to foot.

If only he had remained as he had been, and had asked nothing more. The man always wants to advance, the woman to stand still. Did she love him, or did she not? The girl could not tell.

"You are very silent, little girl," said her father.

"Am I?" said Maisie, with an attempt at brightness. "Why, so are you, Dad! This is the first word you have spoken." She took his hand and gave it a loving squeeze. Fathers, thank goodness, were not like friends.

"I was thinking," he answered.

"Thinking does not agree with you, Lester," broke in Mrs. Carter. "Mr. Medlicott was remarking just now how ill you looked."

"I don't feel very well," said Mr. Carter. "I have had a bad headache for the last two days and it depresses me. I suppose it must be the sudden heat."

"You ought to get out of town for a while," said Mrs. Carter. "It has been too hot for anything, and you are working by far too hard."

"Oh, father," cried Maisie, "I have such a good idea. Let's both go away somewhere and be quiet."

"Good gracious, Maisie, are you mad?" said her mother. "It's the very height of the season, and I have accepted dozens of invitations for you. Let your father run down to Cromer or some such place for a week if he needs rest, but it would be ridiculous for you to go with him."

"I don't care much for going out, mother," said Maisie, "I'd sooner go with father."

"You are a ridiculous girl," said her mother. "Anyone else of your age would be delighted."

"Where would you like to go, Maisie?" asked her father.

"Oh, if we could—I don't suppose we could, though—I should love to go to Abys, to the convent, you know. We might get rooms in the village, such pretty, quaint, clean rooms, in the house of old Mère Angélique. There are lovely walks, and rides, and drives, and I could go up to the convent every day and stay with the Sisters for hours. And you might come, too, very often; and I'd order things for your dinner, Mère Angélique cooks splendidly. Then we'd have our coffee in the garden, and spend our evenings quietly there together—it is so green and shady—you smoking cigarettes and I talking to you. Sometimes we would stop and listen to the nightingales or the chirping of the grasshoppers. It would be lovely and peaceful. I'd show you all the places I like best, and pick the fruit for you, and we'd be ever so happy."

"Well, of all the queer ideas of a holiday!" exclaimed Mrs. Carter. "If you chose Trouville now, or say Ostend, but to want to bury yourself in a pokey Belgian village during the height of the London season is really too funny. I'm sure, Maisie, I don't know where you get your notions. Certainly not from me."

"There, let her alone, let her alone," said Mr. Carter, for Maisie was overwrought by the scene she had been through, and at her mother's words, light as they were, she flushed and her eyes filled with tears.

"I think it sounds charming, and am very much inclined to try it. Could you pack and be ready by to-morrow night, Maisie?"

"Oh yes, father."

"Then we shall go, dear. We shall go."

CHAPTER XVII

MISS JENKINS AS A MINISTERING ANGEL

MRS. SHORTLAND DOBBS lay in her room at the Hotel Cecil, extremely ill with influenza. To her great delight she had been duly presented at Court by the American Minister's wife, but the ceremony nevertheless had turned out to be a disappointment. The day proved cold and wet, the Palace had been draughty, there had been no refreshments, and she returned to her hotel chilled and hungry and depressed. The presentation had in no way come up to her glowing expectations. It had proved to be entirely formal. Royalty had addressed to her no special word, had entrusted her with no friendly message to the great American democracy, had taken no particular notice of her in any way. When she had tried to stop for a moment's conversation she had found it impossible. She was hurried on and out of the presence before she realised what had happened. The British aristocracy ranged around her had looked at her with stony, uninterested eyes. She had tried to become acquainted with certain of its members during the interval of waiting in the ante-room, but they had not responded with cordiality. She had told a neighbour,

a stately dowager, that she was from the States, to which the lady had simply replied, 'So I perceive.' Mrs. Dobbs could not imagine how she had perceived it, unless she were a thought reader, and went on to explain that though American born her family had originally been English, and that she was descended from the Plantagenets, but the lady had said 'Oh, indeed,' and moved away. She had been treated, in fact, much as Hattie Bruce had been treated by the De Smythes, the society leaders in Shapira City, when the Bruces appeared for the first time at a most exclusive 'Social.' This was before Hiram made his great deal in wheat, and discovered that Robert K. Bruce of Scotland had been his ancestor, events that speedily lifted his wife far above the De Smythes.

She thought rather bitterly of many of her countrywomen who had gained admittance to the highest European circles, and yet were people of whom Americans thought very little. For instance, there was Sadie Crouch, daughter of old Sam Crouch, that used to run a twenty-five cent eating-house in the back blocks of New York. If the English aristocracy were so mighty particular, why had they taken up Sadie? She was received in the best London set, 'but at home I wouldn't be seen with her,' mused Mrs. Dobbs dolefully.

As she lay aching and distressed amidst the hotel pillows, Mrs. Dobbs felt so homesick and depressed that, overcome by loneliness, she telegraphed for Miss Jenkins to come to see her.

Miss Jenkins was nothing loath. The busy idleness of her days involved an immensity of running about. Whenever one met her she had just come from something and was just going on to something else. She was willing to make the Hotel Cecil one of her halting-places, and to share the dainty meals that were sent up to the invalid, meals far superior to those of which Miss Jenkins partook at Camomile Street, where burnt chops and underdone potatoes were her staple fare. She brought with her plenty of gossip, but found the patient feverish and too ill to be interested.

As she chatted to the unresponsive Mrs. Dobbs, there was a knock at the door.

"Come in," said Miss Jenkins, and a hotel messenger entered. Someone was below, a gentleman, who desired to see Mrs. Shortland Dobbs.

"What's his name?" asked Mrs. Dobbs feebly.

"He gave no name, madam."

"Will you go down and see him?" said Mrs. Dobbs to Miss Jenkins. "Tell him I am too sick to receive visitors."

Nothing loath, Miss Jenkins descended, but was disappointed to find the stranger was only a clerk from Crescent and Starr, the jewellers. He had brought back a valuable diamond necklace that Mrs. Dobbs had worn at the Drawing-Room. In taking it off she had somehow broken the clasp, and had sent it to be repaired. At Mrs. Dobbs' request, Miss Jenkins looked out some money, paid the bill, and carried the necklace upstairs, where she much admired its splendour.

"Will you just lock it away?" said Mrs. Dobbs.

"The casket is in my trunk, right at the top; the key is under my pillow."

Miss Jenkins obeyed. As she laid the necklace in its tray a scrap of folded paper caught her eye. It looked familiar somehow. "Can it be!" she said. With her back to the bed she deftly opened it. A coupon of *The Comet's* Matrimonial Prize Competition! So Mrs. Shortland Dobbs was a rival competitor!

Miss Jenkins drew a long breath, looked at the coupon again, then quietly slipped it back where she had found it, locked the casket, and returned to her friend's side.

Never had a patient a more assiduous attendant than Miss Jenkins. She was constantly in and out of the sick-room, and in her kindly endeavours to spare her friend's eyes was most particular in preventing such exertion as reading the newspapers. Indeed Mrs. Dobbs was not very anxious to read anything. She lay there limp and uninterested, desirous only to gain sufficient strength to sit up. Two weeks crawled slowly and wearily by.

At last she was able to totter to an arm-chair by the fire, and lie there wrapped in a wadded dressing-gown. She felt lonely and depressed to an uncommon degree, and tears for sorrows she could not specify trickled down her nose, though she was usually a cheerful soul.

"I have no use for the *grippe*," she said to Miss Jenkins. "It has made me feel real miserable, kind of discouraged. I can't exactly say what's the matter, but I'd just like to make 'way with myself. I'm so blue, indigo'd make a white streak on me.

Your British clim'te don't suit me nohow, an' that's a fact. Guess I'd better go home."

"I think you had," said Miss Jenkins sympathisingly. She had come down to see her friend the very day the winning number was published in *The Comet*, and she seemed anxious and absent-minded. "I really think you had, and the sooner the better. Why not go at once? The fine sea air will set you up, and I'll be delighted to help you pack."

"Sakes!" cried Mrs. Dobbs. "You'd never ad-vise me to cross the Atlantic in this horrid weather, and me so weak? Reckon I'd die on the way."

"Well, no. Perhaps not," said Miss Jenkins reluctantly. "Not just immediately, but," brightening, "get out of town at all hazards. Go down to Brighton, or Bournemouth, or some such place, and take a real rest before sailing."

"Happen I may," said Mrs. Dobbs, "though I meant to stay here for the season. In London I don't seem to pull raound nohow."

"I wouldn't exert myself," advised Miss Jenkins. "I wouldn't excite myself. Don't read the papers or anything like that, but just enjoy yourself as much as you can in the open air and sunshine."

"Guess I'll find it vurry dull," said Mrs. Dobbs. "I reckon there won't be a soul I know, and as for reading, I couldn't read a line, not if I wanted to, my eyes smart so. The sooner I git back to 'Murrica the better, now Mr. Shepheard has fixed up that pedigree. It would please and astonish

you, Miss Jenkins, to see the fam'ly we come of. It was an expensive job, but that mahn he did the business real well, an' I don't grudge him what he 'arned."

She spoke with a spark of her old vivacity.

"Oh no! it won't be half as dull as here," said Miss Jenkins, "and I'd really go at once if I were you. They say fogs are expected."

"My," said Mrs. Dobbs. "I do despise fogs. I didn't know you had them in summer."

"They are hateful," agreed Miss Jenkins, "and so dangerous at this time of year, especially to Americans. You can't escape them. I shouldn't risk it if I were you. I really shouldn't. If you'll give me your keys now I'll begin to pack. Oh no! don't thank me. I love being helpful."

Miss Jenkins' notion of packing did not altogether commend itself to her friend, for it appeared to consist chiefly of rummaging through Mrs. Dobbs' belongings.

As the little American lady was too weak to offer much resistance, and was anxious, moreover, to get out of town, all was arranged in a few hours. Miss Jenkins telegraphed for rooms to a Bournemouth hotel, saw her friend to the station next morning and bade her farewell, with the reiterated advice to return to America at the earliest opportunity. Mrs. Dobbs, indeed, in her present state of mind was only too anxious to take that advice. She found English houses draughty, the summers wet and chilly, and deplored the fact that in England one rarely got sufficient bed-covering. In her bodily distress and mental depression she quite

forgot *The Comet* and the coupon, which, in astonishment at and a little envy of the aristocratic alliance to be made by Miss Jenkins, and ignorance of how it was to be brought about, she had purchased, as she phrased it, 'Just to try my luck.'

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PRIZE IS DRAWN

JACK, Otto, and the Count assembled in solemn conclave on the day fixed for the Prize Drawing. The Count by this time was desperately in love with all the competitors, and a nice little sum of over forty thousand pounds was deposited at his bankers, not to be drawn on, however, until the competition was decided and the lady wedded. The drawing was carried out on the Art Union principle, and amidst wild excitement on the Count's part '31,858' was declared to be the winning number.

The announcement was formally made in the columns of *The Comet*, and the lady who owned the duplicate was requested to communicate immediately with the Editor, sending her real name and address.

"You must tell me who she is as soon as you know," said Otto. "I'm dying to see her."

"Not I," returned the Count. "Go find a girl for yourself."

In great mental perturbation the Count awaited each post on the day of publication. Now that the crisis had come he was exceedingly nervous.

"I hope she's a nice girrl," he said twenty times a day. "I do hope she is nice."

He was not left long in suspense. No letter on the subject came for Jack, but that very evening a neatly written note was handed in. It was addressed to 'The Prize, c/o the Editor,' and on the top left-hand corner bore the words 'Matrimonial Competition—Private.'

The Count tore it open. The writer was coy.

"SIR," she said, "I have learned from *The Comet* of this date that the Prize offered in the recent Matrimonial Competition (I blush as I write the words) has been won by ticket 31,858. I beg to say I am the holder of the duplicate coupon, and am therefore fortunate enough to be the winner. Forgive me for writing to you direct, rather than to the Editor, but the circumstances are *so delicate* that I cannot bear the idea of communicating my *real* name and address to anyone but yourself. All letters or telegrams to 103 Barnes Street, W.C., will find me, and until I learn a little more about you, you will, I am sure, pardon and understand the shrinking modesty that impels me to conceal myself behind the pseudonym of

"WOOD VIOLET."

The Count was enraptured. "Understand," he said. "Of course I understand. I'd be an idiot if I didn't. Poor little girrl! It must be awkward for her. 'Wood Violet.' 'Violet.' I wondher if that's her pretty name? Faith, I'd like to get a peep at her before she sees me."

He caught up his hat, and rushed down the office stairs. In twenty minutes MacCarthy returned crestfallen; 103 Barnes Street, W.C., had proved to be a little shop in a street off the Strand, where letters were received on payment of a penny each. No one there knew anything definite about 'Wood Violet,' except that a lady had arranged to call for communications.

"Surely," he thought, "I've heard the name before. In the beginning there were lots of letters from 'Violets' if I remember rightly. I'll look them up and see if there was a 'Wood Violet' amongst them."

The Count accordingly went through the files of letters, and duly came upon the document of which he was in search.

"'Wood Violet' is of haughty mien, yet tender, true, and loving. Over twenty-one years of age, and of high family. Pines for the companionship and devoted affection of one who will be all in all to her. She excels in many accomplishments, and is fond of animals, especially of dogs. Her manners are gentle and winning. She is truthful and ingenuous. Considered handsome. Attracts admiration and attention wherever she goes, but seeks only to find a true heart on which she can rely with confidence."

"Just what I like," said the Count. "Faith, if she's half as nice as she says I'm a lucky man. What a pretty hand she writes, and so bashful and modest too! I'll send her a line at wünce."

"Office of *The Comet.*

"MADAM,—I was gratified to receive the announcement that you are the holder of coupon No. 31,858, and am looking forward eagerly to the pleasure of making your acquaintance. Will you not favour me with your real name and address in confidence? I quite understand your hesitation, but there is no need for it, as you are dealing with a man of honour, and no other eye will see your communication. I would tell you my name, but it is preferable, perhaps, that you should learn all about me from my own lips. Though I know myself to be the real 'Prize Winner' in the Competition, permit me to sign myself for the present,—Your obedient servant,

"'THE PRIZE.'"

There was a flavour of romance about the little mystery that pleased MacCarthy.

The reply was speedy.

"DEAR SIR,—Thanks for your courteous and sympathetic letter. In compliance with your request, and relying on your honourable discretion, I will confess my real name. I am a girl of good family and education, worthy, I hope, *to adorn your rank.* My present address I prefer *not to give,* as we are about to move into more *suitable* quarters, but I am a member of the Athenę Club, and, if you like, you can write me there at *any* time. Hoping soon to hear from you.—Permit me, sir, to sign myself, yours very truly,

"ARETHUSA EVADNE JENKINS."

"Saucy Arethusa! The little darling!" exclaimed the Count enthusiastically. "I must see her. This is a regular romance."

He rushed off to Jack.

"I say, Darracott, didn't I hear you say you knew some people who were members of the Athene Club?"

"Yes," replied Jack. "Mrs. Golightly Carter, for one, is a member."

"Can you find out from her if she knows a Miss Arethusa Jenkins who belongs to it, and enquire what is her private address?"

"Is Jenkins the name of the Prize Winner?" Jack enquired with some curiosity.

"Don't ask questions. You'll know time enough. Just do as I tell you."

"Oh, very well. Keep your own counsel by all means. I will write to Mrs. Carter."

"That's great," said the Count. "Lose no time in getting the address if you can, and send it round to me diggings at wünce."

Mrs. Carter having good-naturedly looked up the private address of Miss Jenkins, found it to be 61 Camomile Street, S.W., a quiet thoroughfare within sound of Saint Sepulchre's church bells. Thither the Count, divided between hope and fear, betook himself early next day in the anticipation of catching a glimpse, 'a private view,' as he said, of the Prize Winner. The house was not beautiful. Over the door hung a card inscribed 'Furnished Apartments.' Secure in the lady's ignorance of his identity, the Count walked up and down on the opposite side of the way, surveying the windows,

speculating as to which was hers, and wondering if he would see a beautiful piquant face, the face of the Saucy Arethusa he pictured, peeping out to brighten the dingy scene. Alas! all was blank.

MacCarthy paced up and down, disappointed at his non-success, and revolving in his mind plans for securing his end. Should he call, pretending to be a book canvasser, a bill collector, a messenger from the Stores, someone who had mistaken the address? No, it would never do, it would be too undignified, besides he had not the requisite courage; she might remember his face when she met him in his proper person, and such a freak might be an inauspicious beginning to his courtship. Ladies do not like to be caught unawares.

As he stood there in perplexity the door of No. 61 opened. A sharp-faced, elderly woman came out. She carried a string bag, as if on shopping bent. The Count looked at her with interest. Who was she, he wondered, landlady, chaperon, fellow-lodger, or relation? If relation, was she mother, aunt, or what to his fair one? Ah! soon he would know. Again the door of 61 opened. This time a man emerged. How disappointing! Still the Count waited. At last his patience was rewarded. A slight, pretty girl with golden hair appeared. She was dressed entirely in white. He caught a glimpse of a dainty foot shod in white kid, as she balanced it a moment on the step while drawing on and buttoning her glove. Her sailor hat and smart parasol were also white, a picture of elegance. The Count had a quick eye for a good figure, and this young lady's was decidedly attractive.

He followed her at a respectful distance. She crossed the street, turned to the left, and entered the Church of Saint Sepulchre in the West.

The Count was in a whirl of excitement. If this were she, things were even better than he had ventured to hope. She was lovely, she was charming, she was good; was ever man so lucky! He stood for five minutes staring at the church portal through which she had disappeared, as if he expected the radiant vision to reappear. Suddenly the disagreeable voice of Reason spoke within him and told him that his only grounds for believing this young lady to be Miss Jenkins was that she dwelt in the same house. He had better make sure before indulging in further raptures.

A little damped by this reflection, he returned to 61, deliberately ascended the steps she had so lately adorned, knocked and rang. The door was opened after some delay by a small, childish-looking servant, with a smut on her nose and a very soiled apron.

"Is Miss Jenkins at home?" he asked.

"I dunno," said the girl briefly.

"Can you enquire?" asked the Count, rather frightened.

The girl went to the top of the kitchen stairs and shrieked 'Missus!'

"Well," replied a voice out of the depths.

"'Ere's a party as says 'e wants Miss Jenkins. Is she in?"

"No. She went out just now."

The Count looked relieved. What excuse could he have given had Miss Jenkins been at home?

"Then the lady I saw go down the street was Miss Jenkins? I thought it might be," he said.

"I s'pose it was," said the girl. "Will you wait for 'er? I must shut the door."

"No, thank you. I prefer not to wait. My business, a . . . is not pressing."

"Oo shall I say called?"

"Oh, it does not matter. Say 'a gentleman.' You're quite sure she has gone out?"

"Yes, sir. Missus seen 'er."

The Count slipped a shilling into her hand.

"I . . . a . . . noticed two ladies leaving the house as I . . . a . . . as I was coming up the street. Can you tell me was one of them Miss Jenkins?"

"I dunno. I didn't see no lydies," said the girl. "I'm too busy, I am, to know who's going in or hout, but I s'pose it must 'ave bin."

"What ladies are living here?"

"Well, there's missus, she's below, an' missus' niece, and Miss Jenkins an' her ma."

"One of the ladies I saw went to Saint Sepulchre's Church. Would that have been Miss Jenkins?" asked the Count insinuatingly.

"Yessir," said the girl. "She goes there constant."

"She wore white, and a sailor hat."

"She does wear wite now an' agin," said the girl, "*and* a syler 'at. She was in black this morning, but likely she changed 'er gownd after I seen 'er."

"Then if that was Miss Jenkins, who was the other lady? Was she her mother? She came out first and carried a string bag."

"O lor no! Miss Jenkins' ma don't never go out. She's quite an old lydy, an' that deaf!"

"Who could it have been then? I shouldn't call her exactly an *old* lady."

"Blest if I know, if it warn't Miss Jenkins herself, unless p'raps 'twas missus' niece. There ain't no one else. She goes out most days to do the marketing, but—— Drat that bell! I can't hanswer no more questions. There's four gen'lemen lodgers 'ere as well, an' only me to do it hall."

At this moment a shrill voice called—

"'Liza, who's that y're gossiping with?"

"Comin'," cried the girl, and hastily slammed the door in the Count's face.

"It's all right," thought the Count with satisfaction. "There is no other girrl in the house. By George! she's a beauty. Mac, me boy, you're in luck.

"'She's all me fancy painted her.
She's lovely, she's divine.'

What a flower to bloom in the wilds of Camomile Street! Faith, I'd be prepared to take her without a penny—if I could afford it—and here's a pot of money into the bargain. The sooner the wedding comes off the better pleased I'll be, and when I have the handling of the cash I'll give 'Liza a five-pound note."

He descended the steps with a joyful air.

"Suppose I try to get a word with her?" he thought. "It would be so much less formal to break the ice in some such fashion. Sure, when all's said and done, she can't eat me, and we'll have to meet some time. But I'm awfully nervous.

Faith! the courage is oozing out of me. I've no spirit at all to be afraid of a girrl."

Debating thus within himself he made his way back to Saint Sepulchre's Church, and watched for the reappearance of the charming young lady. The time the service lasted seemed interminable. At last the scant congregation dribbled out. It consisted chiefly of women, but the pretty girl in white was not amongst them. After waiting in vain the Count entered the building. He discovered to his annoyance that there was another exit into a side street, and by this door no doubt the fair damsel had departed while he had been standing in front.

CHAPTER XIX

THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS

THE need to see Maisie again, to hear from her lips a definite answer, haunted Jack Darracott the livelong day after seeing her in the Park, and kept him awake in the night. Twice he had been on the point of going to the house, had walked as far as the door, and then turned back, telling himself it was better to wait, better to give her time to reflect, better not to embarrass her and expose her to the pitiless teasing of Mrs. Carter and her friends, by trying to meet her twice in the same day. Maisie, he felt, was trembling in the balance. A word might decide her for or against him. He knew enough of women to recognise that a man best shows his tact in such cases by keeping away. Silence and absence plead for him more powerfully than anything he could say. The worst of it was that he simply could not keep away. He waited till the following afternoon and then presented himself at Cleveland Square.

As he rang the bell he murmured to himself with a half smile the words of the old rhyming proverb—

"He who woos a maid should come but seldom in her sight;
But he who woos a widow should pursue her day and night."

"If I were wise I ought not to see her till Thursday; that's the advice I'd give another in my place," he thought, "but I cannot wait. She is too dear for me to be calm and cautious. People are wise only when they are indifferent. Touch us personally in our feelings, our passions, our interests, and none of us are wise."

Parkins opened the door to him with such a look of impenetrable gloom in his face that Jack was startled.

"Is Miss Carter at home?" he asked hesitatingly.

"Yes, sir."

"Can I see her?"

"She isn't receiving visitors, sir."

"Indeed."

"Perhaps you've not heard the news, sir? We're all in deep distress, sir — the kindest master."

"Good heavens! what has happened? I have heard nothing."

"Mr. Carter, sir. He was brought home from the City at lunch time. Had an apoplectic stroke, sir. His life is in danger."

"I'm very much distressed," said Jack with deep concern. "How did Miss Carter——? how did the family bear the shock?"

"Oh, they're taking on dreadful, sir. Mrs. Carter, she's been in hysterics ever since, had to have a doctor herself, and poor Miss Maisie, she's sitting there beside his bed just like a statue, a-holding his hand. It's pitiful to see her."

"I hope," said Jack, "that if I can be of any use they will send for me. I'll call again this

evening in the hope of hearing better news, and if Miss Carter wants any help, wants anything I can do, may I depend on you to wire ? "

He slipped a sovereign into Parkins' hand.

" Yes, sir, certainly, sir. I'll not forget, sir. Thank you."

The evening brought no better news, and next morning all was over. Maisie Carter, her forced calm broken up now there was no further need for helpfulness and self-control, was hanging wildly over her dear father's body, sobbing piteously, and addressing him by every endearing name.

She had watched by his side all night with the attendant nurse, and in the dawn, that chill and silent hour when souls go home, the call had come for Lester Carter. Whatever his faults had been, and they were those of omission rather than of commission, he had loved his daughter dearly, and she had returned his affection with ardour.

Just before the end he struggled back to consciousness for a moment.

" Maisie," he cried feebly, " are you there ? "

" Yes, father. I'm here beside you. Don't you see me ? "

" Maisie, my darling little girl. God bless you." He spoke slowly and with difficulty. " You are a good child—comfort your mother—Darracott loves you. He will help to—to——"

What Darracott was to help in Maisie never knew, for with the words the great change came.

Though Mrs. Carter was hastily roused by the nurse from a troubled sleep, and ran into the room in her night-dress, she was too late for farewell.

A rumour that the Golightly Carters had been left badly off quickly circulated. The shock of losing money was said to have occasioned Mr. Carter's death, and the position of his family was discussed with cynical unconcern. Mrs. Carter had many acquaintances but few friends amongst the amusement-loving people who frequented her house. When she ceased to entertain, they quite naturally ceased to come. A house of mourning was not a house for them.

"A worthless lot," said Mrs. Carter indignantly, when she found that several of her intimates had neither called nor written, while others had contented themselves with perfunctory letters of condolence or with leaving cards.

As soon as Jack heard the news he wrote to Maisie's mother offering his services, and expressing a hope that his knowledge of business matters might make him of some use in regulating their affairs.

The poor woman was completely broken down by the first great sorrow of her life, and was only too ready to accept aid. Jack's heart melted when he saw Maisie, wan and still in her black gown. She had forgotten to be shy with him, accepting his presence as a matter of course, the most natural and helpful thing in the world.

He said not a word that could remind her of their conversation in the Park, and this was at first a relief. Then in a week or two she wondered; had he forgotten their interview? Had he spoken, the girl would almost have hated him; he would have jarred on her feelings, have desecrated her

sorrow. Being silent, such is the nature of women, she speculated, could he have meant what he said, was his love for her real, or was it but an emotion, a passing fancy ?

She was glad to see Darracott. He had understood, he had appreciated her dear father. He knew what that father's death meant to her.

Jack, in his quiet, masterful way, took command of the affairs of the two desolate women. They had no male relations, and were both unused to business. Gradually he disentangled the bewildering and contradictory statements of Mrs. Carter, cleared his way through masses of documents, and brought order out of chaos. Things were not as bad as they looked. There would be a small but sufficient provision for mother and daughter after paying all debts. It would be necessary, however, to move from Cleveland Square, and Maisie's heart was wrung at parting from so many objects endeared to her by long use, and from a house where so much of her young life had been spent.

A real affection for Jack began to spring up. He was to her the one thing stable in a shifting world. Never till now had she felt or known the need of a man's protection. Hitherto she had had her father, careless, good-natured, easy, ready to humour her fancies, and ready also to defend her if need were. Her life had been free from sordid money troubles, which, whatever the wealthy may say, embitter every evil common to humanity.

She felt now how very different was her position as poor Maisie Carter, who might yet have to be a governess or companion, from that of Miss Carter

of Cleveland Square, the only child of a rich and generous father. Gratitude to Jack for his affection swayed her. She recognised that it was well for her to have a lover so strong, so unselfish.

The chances were that if her father had not died, if she had not been thrown on Jack for aid, sympathy, and comprehension, she would never have loved him. She would have recoiled from the facts of life, from taking, as she had said, her fate in her hand, from venturing into the unknown.

Time passed on. The days lengthened into weeks, weeks crept into months. Not a word was said between the two with respect to their conversation of the summer in the Park. Jack seemed to have forgotten all about it. Maisie did not do him the injustice to think that her altered fortunes kept him silent. Sincerity is unmistakable, and he was as honest as the day. When he had told her he loved her she had believed him, but she began to think that perhaps on knowing her better he had changed his mind. Then she felt, moreover, that now she would be a bad match for him. Everyone spoke of him as a man of importance. *The Comet* had become a valuable property, and his long projected book had been wonderfully successful. It was one of the few that are at once literary and popular. The critics praised the style, the public appreciated the story. He could marry anyone he chose, Maisie told herself daily. Why should he remember a passing fancy, genuine enough at the time, but still, no doubt, a passing fancy? How good he was, how

dear. How blest she might be if only he were faithful. Still, better—far better he should have found out his mistake as to his feelings before it was too late. Yet, with feminine inconsistency, Maisie sorrowed.

CHAPTER XX

THE COUNT IS SURPRISED

THE Count returned to his lodgings in a state of ecstasy. How right he had been to trust his luck. Once more it had not failed him. Having provided himself with pen, ink, and paper, he sat down and, after many failures, laboriously indited the following letter :—

" MADAM,—In having won for my bride a young lady of charm and loveliness such as yours, fortune is on my side. As I am willing, of course with your consent, to carry out the promises made on my behalf in the paper, I beg to ask whether under the peculiar circumstances, relying on the honour of a gentleman, you will arrange to meet me at any place most convenient to you, that you may judge if you consider me worthy to claim you. I am profoundly conscious of my deficiencies, though I hope to atone for them by sincere affection, but if on acquaintance you do not like me, Heaven forbid I should press my suit further. If you cannot meet me, will you permit me to call on you ? If you desire to be accompanied by a friend or relation it shall be as you wish. Personally I

should prefer our interview to be private, and will take it as a mark of confidence if you come alone. My real name I will disclose when we meet.—Your obedient servant, THE PRIZE."

This epistle afforded Miss Jenkins immense gratification, and she at once replied in suitable terms.

"DEAR SIR,—The favour you ask is embarrassing to a girl who has been brought up as strictly as I, but our position is *so* unusual and *so romantic* that I do not feel justified in refusing your request. I will be in the Broad Walk, Kensington Gardens, by the third bench from the Notting Hill Gate entrance at four o'clock on Wednesday afternoon, and, as you desire it, will come alone. I shall be dressed in white with a blue sash and a sailor hat, and will carry a bouquet of *pink carnations*. May I ask that you will wear a similar flower in your buttonhole and carry a *white* pocket handkerchief? —Believe me, dear sir, yours faithfully,

"ARETHUSA E. JENKINS.

"'Wood Violet.' No. 31,858."

How Count MacCarthy got through the time that intervened between the receipt of this letter and the Wednesday afternoon he never knew. There remained in his memory a vague recollection of walking, walking through interminable lines of streets till too tired to go farther, of turning into a restaurant and having but small appetite, of trying to pass the evening at a Music Hall, and neither seeing nor hearing the performance, of a

sleepless night. Suffice to say that three o'clock in the afternoon of Wednesday found him dressed with a scrupulous care by no means characteristic, and pacing the Broad Walk at Kensington Gardens, consulting his watch every three minutes. He wore a summer-like suit of grey, with irreproachable frock-coat, shiny top-hat, patent leather shoes that pinched his feet, and the very largest and pinkest of Malmaison carnations. His jolly red face beamed out like the sun through a fog, but it wore a somewhat perplexed and anxious air, since, now things had come to the point, all his nervousness had rushed back on him, and he felt the desperate importance of what he was about to do. Would he succeed in making a favourable impression? Every glimpse of white in the distance made his heart thump like a steam hammer. Each time, however, the wearer on a nearer approach proved to be nothing like the golden-haired girl, nor did she carry a bunch of carnations. Once she was a nursemaid; once a young woman with her lover; once a slim schoolgirl with a plait hanging down her back.

How ridiculous that he should be each time so startled! It still wanted a quarter of an hour to the appointed time, but he was weary of walking up and down, so he took a seat on the third bench and resigned himself to waiting. He pulled down his coat, pulled up his cuffs, dusted his patent leather shoes, rearranged his tie, and felt that he looked very spruce. A sudden freakish impulse moved him to conceal his carnation and tuck away his handkerchief to see what she would do when she

came. He smiled as he pictured her face. Would she look around for him, and would she give any sign of disappointment at not seeing the signal? Perhaps he might speak to her first, and then, if she appeared angry or alarmed, reassure her by showing his flower. He removed his pink badge and placed it carefully behind him on the seat, then assuming as unconcerned an air as possible, looked out for his charming inamorata. Men, women, and children passed without noticing him, but there was no sign of a girl in a white dress and a blue sash. He looked at his watch. It was just four. He looked again, five minutes past; she was not punctual, but then women seldom were. How horrible, though, if she did not come, if she thought the procedure too unconventional, if at the last moment she had drawn back. He looked anxiously up and down. No, there was no one in sight who might be she, but straight opposite him he noticed for the twentieth time an elderly woman wearing a sailor hat and a long dark cloak, who had been persistently walking up and down, and who now eyed him sharply. There seemed to him something familiar about her appearance. He had a good memory for faces, and felt sure he had seen her before, but where and when he could not imagine. What struck him, however, with a momentary chill was that in her hand she carried a bouquet of pink carnations.

"Odd," thought he, "that another woman with a bunch of carnations should happen to come here at this time."

He took no further notice, however, but looked

once more at his watch. Twenty minutes past—was she never coming!

Suddenly he noticed that the woman in the dark cloak was advancing towards him with a sidling step, and in another moment she had taken a seat on the same bench. He looked up and down anxiously, so did she. He consulted his watch for the fiftieth time, so did she. At last she turned to him and said simperingly—

"Excuse me, but you've been here for some time, have you not?"

"Yes, madam," said the Count, surprised.

"I observed you sitting on this seat when I came. Perhaps you can tell me if you noticed a gentleman waiting anywhere about."

"A gentleman? I? No, madam; what is he like?"

"I . . . I hardly know," faltered the lady. "A handsome young man, wearing a . . . a pink carnation in his buttonhole."

"A pink carnation?" exclaimed the Count, completely taken aback. "Did you say a pink carnation?"—Could this peculiar person be a messenger—someone 'Wood Violet' had sent to say she could not come?

"Yes," said the lady, with a winning smile. "My—a—friend was to wear a pink carnation and carry a white handkerchief, and was to meet me here. I begin to fear I have missed him. Have you seen him by any chance?" As she spoke she shook the bunch she carried.

"Good Lord! no, ma'am!" cried the Count with the energy of alarm, and as he spoke, by a

dexterous flick of his finger and thumb under shelter of his coat-tails he sent his own carnation flying into the grass behind him unobserved.

"Oh," said the lady, a little surprised at his vehemence, "I beg your pardon. I thought perhaps you might have. I've been so long waiting. It *is* tiresome that my friend should be so late."

"Is he late?" stammered the Count.

"Yes, very. He was to have been here at four, and it is now half-past."

The Count's brain was in a whirl. He checked the horrible thought that thrust itself on him. It was merely a coincidence, of course, but what an astonishing coincidence that two women with carnations had appointed to meet two men with carnations at the exact same place and at the same day and hour!

"I hope you will forgive me for speaking to you," went on the lady sweetly, "but you look so kind, and you were here before me, and—and seemed to be looking for someone yourself, so I thought you might have noticed my—my friend."

"Oh dear, no," said the Count hastily. "I am looking for nobody; it is only me manner. I—I'm a stranger."

CHAPTER XXI

THE MODEST WOOD VIOLET

WHILE MacCarthy was still revolving in his brain this extraordinary occurrence, he was attracted by a movement of his companion. She began to unbutton her long dark mantle of some thin stuff, and then, standing up, divested herself of it, revealing to the horrified eyes of the Count a blue sash, and a gown of white material from under the hem of which protruded two substantial feet, heavily shod in black leather.

Was it possible? Could it be? No! surely this was not 'Wood Violet.' He scouted the idea, but a dreadful weight of anxiety pressed upon his heart. Who else could it possibly be?

Utterly bewildered and chapfallen, his visions of happiness scattered to the winds at sight of this queer apparition, he sat staring, horror-stricken, at his neighbour. Conviction grew upon him. There could be no mistake. This was some terrible fatality. Whether she were the real Prize Winner or not, the real writer of the letter signed 'Wood Violet,' the original 'Arethusa Jenkins,' the owner of Coupon No. 31,858, there could be little

doubt this was the person who had come to keep the appointment. White dress, blue sash, sailor hat, bunch of carnations, all were correct.

In a flash he remembered where he had seen the lady. She it was who had left the house in Camomile Street with a bag in her hand.

"Good heavens!" he thought, "what can have brought her here? What shall I do? She must have come with a message, an excuse. But why this dress? Why the carnations? Sure I can't have made a mistake! Confound Eliza!" He burst into a cold perspiration.

"Did you speak?" said the lady, looking at him hard.

"Not I," said the Count in alarm. "'Tis only—only repeating a line of poetry I was."

"I adore poetry," said the lady.

The Count eyed her askance.

"If this is really 'Wood Violet,'" he thought, "I'm done for. I must find out somehow. If she is, I'll be off, and the quicker the better, but the case is too desperate to leave it in doubt. I hope to goodness she does not suspect me. What am I to say? What am I to do? O Lord, Lord! What a fool I've been."

He coughed nervously. The lady glanced at him in some alarm. She began to think he was very odd in his manner.

Having folded her cloak and laid it beside her, set her hat straight and placed her flowers in a prominent position on her knee, she once more looked up and down the Broad Walk. The Count, having first satisfied himself by a hasty glance

behind him that his carnation was nowhere visible, cleared his throat.

"The gentleman has not come yet," he remarked insinuatingly.

"No," said his neighbour anxiously. "It is very strange."

"Oh, not at all, not at all," said the Count hastily. "I daresay something has detained him. No doubt he'll turn up presently. What did you say he was like? I—I might spot him."

"Oh," replied the lady in some confusion, "a—a fine young fellow, tall and slight but broad-shouldered, with dark curly hair."

"The deuce he is?" said the Count, breathing more freely. "And his face?"

"His face? Oh! his face I can't exactly describe. I'm not good at descriptions, but I'd know him anywhere."

"Your brother, I think you said," remarked the Count mendaciously. "If so, no doubt he resembles you."

"Oh no, I didn't say my brother," answered 'Wood Violet' in delicate confusion. "You mistook me. He is—as a matter of fact he is my—my *fiancé*."

"Your what?"

"My *fiancé*."

"Your *fiancé*?"

"Yes," said Miss Jenkins, bursting into confidences, "he is the nobleman to whom I am engaged."

"And so you are engaged to a nobleman?" said MacCarthy as soon as he could speak.

"Yes," said the lady, simpering. "It is a long story, quite a romance. He wrote making an appointment to meet me here this afternoon. I was to carry a bouquet of carnations."

"Lord!" exclaimed the Count.

"Did you speak?" asked the lady.

"I? No, ma'am, no indeed," said the Count hastily. "Pray continue."

"I asked him, dear fellow, to wear a buttonhole of the same flowers. They are my favourites—but oh! good gracious, to think of my telling all this to you—a perfect stranger——" said the lady, stopping short suddenly with engaging modesty.

"Your confidence is quite safe with me, madam," said the Count grimly. "I wouldn't betray it for iny consideration. But may I ask why, if you're engaged to this gentleman——"

"Nobleman," corrected the lady.

"I beg your pardon, to this nobleman—may I ask why you found it necessary to wear these flowers?"

"Oh, that's exactly where the romance comes in," explained the lady. "Though we are engaged we have never yet met, that is to say, I have seen him but he has never seen me. It is a most extraordinary story."

"It seems so," growled the Count. "But since you've honoured me so far, may I ask, ma'am, if you've never met, how have you become engaged?"

"Oh, that," said the lady, with an engaging smile, "that is our little secret," and she looked coquettishly at her neighbour. "I may say, however, it came about largely through correspondence."

As she spoke she drew out a document which the

horror-stricken Count recognised as his letter to her, opened it, and seemed to absorb herself in a fond and smiling perusal of its contents.

"She's a lunatic," he said to himself, "a dangerous lunatic. How am I to get rid of her?"

"But aren't you afraid," pursued the Count, catching his breath, "a . . . a . . . gentle female like you, that when you meet the man you may not like him? I tell you what; you may be disappointed. He may not be all you picture him. He may be—hem!—ugly, elderly, vicious, worthless, heartless."

"Oh no," said the lady, with a reproachful shake of her head. "I know that he is young and handsome. I do not speak so particularly of his face, but he has a fine figure and beautiful hair."

The Count drew himself up.

"Then he is wealthy, titled, and those who know him best give him every praise. In short, sir, I have reason to believe that, in the fullest sense of the word, I have won a prize."

The Count groaned. His worst fears were confirmed.

"Have you?" he ejaculated. "A prize! You're lucky."

"Am I not?" responded 'Wood Violet' with fervour.

"But his disposition, ma'am. You can know nothing of the man's disposition."

"I have divined with a woman's insight the nobility of his soul."

"Indeed?" said the Count.

"None of us are perfect," went on 'Wood

Violet' with dignity, "and if there are some slight defects in his character, spots on the sun as it were, I hope to correct them. He is—he is deeply, devotedly attached to me."

"The deuce he is! It—it's happy for you to be so sure of his affection."

"Yes, when a man loves a woman she can mould him to anything, anything."

"Can she indeed?"

"Ah!" said 'Wood Violet,' with horrible archness. "Do you then doubt the power of love?"

"Oh, this is too much," cried the Count involuntarily. "Too much, I can't endure it."

"Then you do doubt its power?"

"No, no, ma'am," cried the Count hurriedly. "Not for a moment. Still, in the present instance, judging just by what you've told me, are you not apparently—of course, only apparently—taking a great deal for granted?"

"Not at all," said 'Wood Violet.' "You cannot imagine the tenderness with which he writes, the passionate protestations that have moved my heart. If you could only see this letter, for instance, you would know with what good ground I rely on him."

"Faith, I never knew till now I had made it as affectionate as that," groaned MacCarthy to himself; then aloud, "Well, ma'am, of course you have advantages in that respect denied to me, still I think it only right to warn you. He may not be all you imagine. Faith, this life is full of the most astonishing surprises. I have had miny meself. He may not come up to your just expecta-

tions. I feel sure, somehow, that he won't. Queer, isn't it? But I do. 'Tis a presentiment."

"Oh, nonsense," said 'Wood Violet' sharply. "I don't believe in presentiments. How could you possibly know?"

"I know me sex, ma'am," said the Count, "and, believe me, they're a disappointing lot. Men are fickle. 'Tis a shame for him now not to be here to meet you. He must be—hem!—a base fellow to keep you waiting. If I were you, speaking as a friend, I'd have no more to do with him. I'd go straight home, and write and tell him so. If he doesn't come at all, maybe you're well rid of him. In your place I'd not rely on him too much, no, indeed I wouldn't, nor be too much disappointed. Don't ever depend on what a man writes. The chances are he doesn't mean it."

"But I will depend on it. I must," said 'Wood Violet' with warmth.

"'Deceivers ever,' that's what men are," said the Count. "The immortal poet made no mistake. Don't you trust the fellow."

"Sir," said the lady with dignity, "your language and warnings are alike extraordinary and uncalled for. How can you, a stranger, presume to warn me against a man—a nobleman—of whom you know nothing, who is the soul of honour? How can you venture to refer to him as 'a fellow'? I do rely on him: I will rely on him. I insist on relying on him: and if he attempts to treat me badly the law will protect an injured female."

The Count groaned hollowly.

"Damn the law!" said he with vehemence.

"How dare you swear!" cried 'Wood Violet.' "This is insufferable."

"I beg your pardon, it was very wrong of me, but I do not like to see a woman—a—a—" with a gulp,—"a lovely woman set her heart on a man whom I feel persuaded, somehow, is unworthy of her, quite unworthy. Oh, believe me, madam, entirely unworthy."

"Begone!" said 'Wood Violet.' "I will not listen to a word against him. I love him with all the force of a youthful heart, and nothing will change me. Do not try to warp my nature. I am constancy itself in my affections."

"'Tis the vice of your sex, ma'am," said the Count. "You will repent it. Man's greatest grievance against woman is her unconquerable fidelity."

"Perhaps you mean well," said 'Wood Violet,' relenting slightly as she remembered that he had called her a lovely woman. "No doubt you do. Pray do not think me rude in rejecting your warning." She looked at him sweetly, so sweetly that the Count's blood ran cold. "But I must be, I will be true to him."

"Don't," said MacCarthy. "It will be better for you. Go home now, like a sensible woman,—that is if he does not come within the next five minutes, —and resolve never to see the fellow again."

"I'll do no such thing," said 'Wood Violet' with asperity. "Too much depends on it."

"Lord," groaned MacCarthy to himself, "what an awful woman. 'Tisn't because she's old, nor because she's ugly, though faith she's both, but

her airs and flutterings and waggings of her head and grimaces and screwing up of her eyes are too much. Not at any price. I'll reject her. I'll renounce her, and the money too. It may go to the divil. I'll tell Darracott to be hanged." He rose. "Well, madam, if I meet a gentleman answering to your description and wearing a carnation, I will direct him to this seat."

"Oh, thank you," said 'Wood Violet' effusively. "He cannot be long now. Good-bye, and so many thanks for your kindness. Gentlemen always are so kind to me."

Avoiding her eye with the self-consciousness of a convicted felon, the Count raised his hat and made haste to turn down a side path.

"'Tis just my luck," he said miserably. "What else could I expect? If it only had been that nice-looking girrl, but sure it was too good to be true. Oh, what a fool I was to write at all until we found out the truth! How on earth am I to get out of this? She looks an awfully determined woman, the sort that would marry a man by force if she made up her mind to it. She has a long chin on her that spells obstinacy."

The cold perspiration broke out in beads on his forehead.

"She'll have me," he thought, "she'll have me, as sure as fate, if I don't run away; but I will. I'll fly the country. Marry her, good Lord!!! Marry her!! Faith, if marriages are made in heaven I have no friends there."

In his agony of mind he leaned against a tree.

"If she had only guessed who I was," he reflected,

"she'd have pounced on me. What bee has she in her bonnet about having seen me? There's some mistake, thank goodness. She never laid eyes on me before, that's evident. Well, I give it up."

He looked back timidly to see if he was being followed, but there was no one in sight.

"Sure 'tis me own fault," he thought bitterly. "I've nowun else to blame. Why did I mix meself up with inything of the kind? Why didn't I leave the women alone? 'Twas mad I was, no less, and I deserved to fall in with a raving lunatic.—I ask you," he said, addressing space, "how am I to get rid of her now?"

CHAPTER XXII

THE COUNT MAKES UP HIS MIND

A PALE and haggard Count turned up at the offices of *The Comet* the day after his encounter with Miss Jenkins. He had a wilted look, his jovial air had disappeared, his drooping moustache and the set of his hat indicated profound depression.

"What's wrong, MacCarthy?" cried Jack, the moment he caught sight of him.

"'Tis your infernal scheme that's wrong," said the Count savagely. "Sure I was a fool ever to have had inything to do with it."

"Why, here's a sudden change of front! Only yesterday you were quite cock-a-hoop."

"Ah," said MacCarthy, "so I was, more fool I, but—" in a tone of the deepest misery—"sure I hadn't seen her then!"

"And do you mean to say you've seen her since?—the Prize Winner?"

The Count nodded gloomily, at the same time thrusting his hands deep in his trousers pockets.

"And you don't like her?"

"What in thunder are ye badgering me for?" cried the Count with sudden wrath. "Isn't it easy seeing by me I don't like her? Listen here,

Darracott, I can't do it. 'Pon me soul I can't, not for double the money. I cry off this game. Be the consequences what they may, sir, I cry off."

"But, MacCarthy, you can't. You're pledged, man. There's no getting out of it. You must go on."

"Then I won't," said the Count, wagging his forefinger with decision. "See here, 'twas me friendship for you got me into this mess, an' I look to you to get me out of it."

"But you were willing to take the chance."

"So I was, but how could I know when I backed me luck it would turn out so damned bad? I reckoned up the thing. She may be oldish, said I to meself, or she may be ugly, or she may be foolish, but I never dreamt she'd be all of them. How could I? How could iny man? If she was a creature that conducted herself like a sensible, middle-aged woman, I might put up with her; I don't pretend to be so young and lovely meself that I look for perfection; but sheep dressed lamb-fashion never suited me!"

"It's extremely awkward," said Jack, "especially as the paper has announced the winning number. If she owns the winning number I don't see what can be done."

"So it is," agreed the Count, "infernally awkward for me. And now, what's to be done? I'm desp'rate."

"Don't be too hasty. Perhaps she's better than you think."

"She's worse," said the Count with decision.

"She may improve on acquaintance."

"She won't, and I desire no further acquaintance with her."

"But what are we to do?"

"I don't know. Tell her 'twas a mistake. Stop it inyhow."

"We can't."

"You must," said the Count, "for I won't be tied to her, not if there wasn't another woman on earth."

"How can I?"

"I don't know," cried the exasperated Count. "Offer her all the money if she'll let me off. Maybe she'll take it and go to blazes."

"Preposterous! I don't know that we are at liberty to dispose of it in that way. It was sent us for a different purpose."

"Then the only alternative is to smash up this Competition and return the money. I won't touch it. I'm sorry I ever consented."

"No, no!" cried Otto. "That would never do. Don't be so hasty. There may be some other way out of it. Why should you beggar yourself at a stroke? Besides, it would be a dreadful blow to the paper."

"But, great Heaven!" exclaimed the Count, "if marrying her is to be the alternative, how can I hesitate? No, the sooner the better. Tell the public you made a mistake."

"A nice admission to make. What kind of an editor do you take me to be?"

"As if it mattered in such a crisis! For Heaven's sake put that paper out of your mind for once. Think of me and of me cruel position."

"I do. That is why I am not going to let you throw away forty thousand pounds until it is inevitable. Wait till we hear a little more."

"No," said the Count, "let it go. Maybe when she finds I am penniless she will see it is no good claiming me. I never did inything before in me life for money, and badly this has turned out! Let me go back to me poverty with an easy mind."

"But your mother?—you were saying how much you hoped to do for her," said Jack.

MacCarthy's face changed slightly.

"So I was, poor old lady. Sure 'twas a dream, an' for her sake I regret it hasn't come true. We'll have to pull along somehow, as we have done till now."

"And the bath-chair, and the cure for rheumatism, and all the rest, must go?" said Otto.

"I'm afraid so. I see no other way," said the Count forlornly.

"Listen here, MacCarthy, don't be an idiot. Wait a while. I won't let you throw up everything in this funk. It would be the act of a fool."

"'Twas getting into it was the act of a fool," groaned the Count.

"Then at least get out of it like a wise man. It is the lady's turn to move. See what she will do. Temporise. Gain time. Be patient. Does she seem to be a woman who could be talked over?"

"I don't think so," said the Count gloomily. "From the little I saw of her she seemed to me to be a woman determined on matrimony."

"Still you saw only a little of her. She may be

different from what she appears. Let us hear what she has to say for herself, then, if you still adhere to your resolution, we can see if she is to be bought off at a modest figure. *The Comet* can afford to advance the money."

"Sure we can try," said the Count, "but I'm not hopeful."

"We must endeavour not to hurt her feelings. Even if she proves to be all you say, it is not exactly pleasant for any woman to be refused by a man," said Jack.

The Count was silent for a space, then he said, "I don't want to hurt her feelings."

"You can't avoid it if you begin by rejecting her, and telling her to take the money. No, Mac. You might point out that you'd make an undesirable husband for her. You might give what account you liked of yourself and your disposition, and then wind up by gently suggesting compensation."

"Begad, it would be no good," said the Count. "I tried it already, and not wun word would she hear against me. You may talk to her this time. She may listen to you. 'Tis far too flattering you were in that paper of yours, Darracott. All the praise has ruined me entirely. She's wild about me, worse luck."

"Do you mean to say you have actually spoken to her and disclosed your identity?" cried Otto.

"I've spoken to her, sure enough, but catch me disclosing me identity when I saw the kind she was. No, I just advised her, in a friendly, disinterested sort of way, to have nothing at all to do with me. I said enough, I thought, to put iny

woman off, but faith she stuck to her belief in me good qualities, thanks to your eloquence."

"Perhaps your advice will come with more force when she knows who you are," suggested Jack; but the Count remained plunged in thought, his feet extended, his eyes fixed on the floor.

"It's deuced awkward," said Hazlitt. "I'm sure I don't see what is to be done except to offer to compensate her."

"Let her take the whole lot, and me blessing to her," said the Count. "Sure I'd sooner be poor and happy. Death before slavery!"

"It would be a pity if she is the sort of person you describe," said Hazlitt; "besides, I have no doubt she'd be contented with much less."

"That's what I say," remarked Jack.

"You ought to get legal advice on the matter," said Otto. "I am no lawyer, and I may be wrong, but it seems to me that if the Count refuses to marry the Prize Winner he is not free to touch the money or to devote it to any other purpose, such as compensating the woman he has rejected. I fancy he would lay himself open to legal proceedings."

"If she'd be put off with a few hundreds I can easily raise it," said Jack. "There would be no difficulty about that now, and MacCarthy deserves all we can do for him; but if she is the sort of person he represents her to be, she may think she has the chance of a big thing and demand something we cannot pay."

"I notice you both insert the proviso 'if' she is as bad as I say," cried the Count testily. "Why the divil should you doubt that she is as bad as I say?"

"I don't," said Jack soothingly, "still, you are hardly a fair judge at present; her disposition may be better than her looks."

"It isn't," said the Count fractiously; "all the vixens are not good-looking, iny more than all the clever women are frights. And now what am I to do?"

"Take my advice," said Otto, "and accept the situation. We never obtain just what we want in this life. Our treasures are never flawless, and, after all, you will get a good deal. I'd advise you to make the best of the matter, and marry the lady. She cannot be so obnoxious that forty thousand pounds will not gild the pill."

"But she is," said the Count; "and if you like her you may marry her yourself, for I won't."

"Alas!" cried Otto, "she wouldn't take me after you."

"None of your jeers," said MacCarthy sulkily.

"Well, at any rate, as I told you, it is best to lie low and let her make the first move," said Jack.

At this moment Boyle appeared with an air as if something exciting had happened.

"Please, sir," he said, "there's a lady downstairs who wants to know the name of the Prize in our Matrimonial Competition. I said as I didn't know, and she said she insisted. She says she must speak to the gentleman immediate, and I told her he wasn't here, and then she asked for the Editor, and she's took a chair, and says she won't go away till she sees both of them."

The three men looked at each other in perplexity.

"'Tis she," said the Count with a groan. "I know it. I felt she'd come. Darracott, befriend me. 'Tis in your interests I'm sacrificed. I'm afraid of that woman."

"Afraid, nonsense!" said Jack, who himself did not look quite easy. "It may not be she. Boyle, ask the lady's name."

Boyle disappeared like a flash, and returned almost as quickly.

"She has wrote her name on a bit of paper, sir, and put it in an envelope, and says it is private and must be opened only by the Prize."

"That's all right," said Jack. "Give it here, Boyle. We'll attend to it. You may go."

The Count seized the envelope with shaking fingers. Within it was a slip inscribed 'Wood Violet, 31,858.'

"'Tis she," said the Count. "I won't see her."

"But she's waiting, Mac. We must think what is to be done. What are we to say to her? Tch, man! you're shaking like a leaf! I never thought you were so nervous. Take a glass of whisky and pull yourself together."

"Nervous is it?" quavered the Count. "Begad, I never knew I had nerves till she got on them, but I'd creep into a rat-hole from her this minute."

"You really had better see her," said Jack. "I'll go, and she can be shown in here."

"I'll not be left," replied the Count with determination, clutching Jack by the arm as he spoke. "It's mean of you to propose it. I won't see her at all. Do you receive her and account for me absence as best you can."

"I fear you've got to face it," said Jack.

"Lord!" groaned the Count. "Why isn't it a fight?"

"It probably will be," responded Darracott.

"Hazlitt," said the Count, "you see her."

"Yes," urged Jack. "Do you see her."

"Gain time," said the Count. "Tell her I'm not here."

"That neither of us is here," corrected Jack.

"Say that we'll write to her, that we're very busy, that our solicitor will call on her, say anything you choose but get her off the premises," cried the Count. "Then I'll make a bolt for safety."

"Well," said Otto, "I don't half like the business, but I'll do my best as you're both in such a funk."

"Be civil," said Jack.

"Be firm," said the Count.

"Give me no more advice," said Otto, "but let me act as the spirit moves me."

Two minutes passed, three minutes, five, ten. The Count and Jack, with the air of condemned criminals, awaited Otto's return. At last he came.

"Phew!" he cried with an air of relief. "She's gone! I thought I'd never get rid of her." He sank into a chair.

"Is she really gone?" asked the Count eagerly.

"She is, for the present, but she says she will come back."

"What did you tell her?"

"Whatever came into my head. I apologised for your unavoidable absence, I told her she would hear from you, I was polite, I was complimentary, but I could see she distrusted me profoundly. She

left in a huff, with a firm conviction that we are in league to swindle her and cheat her out of the Prize."

"And now, honour bright," said the Count eagerly, "tell the truth, you think she's as bad as I described her?"

"I do," said Otto with conviction.

"And if you were me, having seen her, would you marry her for forty thousand pounds?"

"Not for a million, MacCarthy.—I'll fight your battle to the death."

CHAPTER XXIII

MISS JENKINS TAKES COUNSEL

WE left Miss Jenkins sitting on the third bench to the left of the Broad Walk in Kensington Gardens. Having stuck to her post until half-past eight o'clock without seeing a young man with a carnation in his buttonhole and a white kerchief in his hand, the lady began to think she might as well go home. She felt chilly and depressed.

Why had the Prize not come? Could he have mistaken the place of meeting? Was he perchance waiting for her somewhere? Impossible. She had been too explicit. What then had kept him? Was his absence to be attributed to accident or design? Perhaps he was a stranger to London and had lost his way. Perhaps he had been run over, or stricken with sudden illness. Perhaps pressing business had interfered. Some explanation, a letter or a telegram, might be waiting her at the Athene Club in the morning. She would enquire.

A cold wind arose, blowing dust and stray leaves in elfin whirls round her. She felt a touch of rheumatism, and wished she had worn a warmer

gown. In her disappointment the words of the stout gentleman who had sat for a time beside her recurred. How pessimistic he had been: 'Perhaps the man won't come,' he had said. 'I feel as if he wouldn't. You may be well rid of him.' Horrid thing! Why did he say that? How could he know? What concern was it of his? Depressing creature! Could he have had any design in making these remarks, or was it pure accident? Could he have been sent by anyone —by the Editor, for instance? At the thought a wave of anger and excitement passed over her.

She passed an agitated night. The Athene did not open till half-past ten, but that hour found her at the door. She examined the letter-rack with anxious eye. It contained neither letter nor telegram for her.

As to what she had better do under the circumstances Miss Jenkins was woefully exercised. She was anxious to be correct, to betray no undue precipitancy, to act with maiden modesty and reserve, to give the Prize no cause for complaint; yet the case seemed to call for prompt action. If there were any underhand intrigues in progress to deprive her of her nobleman, she should be there to frustrate them. If the Lottery were a fraud, *The Comet* should be shown up.

After reviewing the situation, she decided to go down to the office and see both the Editor and the Prize. Better show them that she was not to be trifled with. Perhaps her letter signed 'Wood

Violet' had been a mistake, leading them to think by its exceeding bashfulness that she would endure bad treatment. She would disabuse them of the idea. The Prize had written so pleasantly that she felt persuaded his failure to keep their appointment had not been his fault; but she would sift the matter to the bottom, and would let no editor come between them.

In this frame of mind Miss Jenkins, as already shown, presented herself at the office, and being determined to stand no nonsense, showed herself extremely restive when Boyle expressed his inability to give her the real name of the Prize. Her subsequent unsatisfactory interview with Otto Hazlitt tended to deepen her impression that something adverse to her interests was in contemplation, and if at last she retired, it was only, as the French proverb puts it, to jump the better.

Miss Jenkins thought meanly of her sex, but had profound admiration for that glorious creature, man. In the present instance she felt disposed to seek a confidant of the stronger sex, who might be induced to back her claim against *The Comet* if need arose. Mr. Archibald Durham at once occurred to her as a clever man, bound to her by ties of interest, and likely to give good advice. Accordingly she made her way to the office of *The Balmoral Magazine* in the hope of seeing him.

The magazine, unfortunately, had continued to disappoint Mr. Durham's just expectations, owing

to the determined set made, as narrated, against sound literature by a formidable body of news-agents and booksellers. The public, too, had proved more degenerate than could have been believed. In fact, the owner felt it would be impossible to continue publication much longer if none of his friends hastened to the support of genius. He rejoiced that the office rent had been paid in advance out of the money lent by Miss Jenkins, as he found it just then an agreeable, if rather solitary, refuge, where he spent most of his time. Domestic trouble had fallen on him. Worn out by a long career of scanty food and dunning creditors, of lies and makeshifts, of tall talk and short commons, great expectations and blasted hopes, of the wear and tear and fret of the sordid everyday life led by herself and ignored by her husband, Mrs. Durham had died after a few days' illness, and had been buried at the expense of her vulgar brother. This common individual, who had no literary feeling whatever, had taken the three youngest children to live with him and his wife, but the elder ones he left in Mr. Durham's care. They made home so noisy and intolerable that their father remained as little as possible in their society, and they ran wild without let or hindrance.

When Mr. Durham, in answer to a knock, cried 'Come in,' Miss Jenkins entered, and discovered him poised in an arm-chair, which he had tilted back at a comfortable angle, with his feet elevated on the table before him. He was reading a French novel, and smoking a cigarette. A wreath of pale-blue smoke filled the room, and set Miss Jenkins

coughing violently. At the sound Mr. Durham started, almost overbalancing himself, hastily withdrew his feet from the table, dropped his book and his cigarette, and advanced with outstretched hand to his visitor.

"I have come, Mr. Durham," said Arethusa, "on—personal business—on a—a delicate and important matter as to which I desire to secure your valuable advice."

"I am at your disposal," he replied with a courteous bow.

"I hardly know how to begin," faltered Miss Jenkins. "The circumstances are so peculiar, so embarrassing. It is because I know what a clever man you are, and what a good head you have, that I have come to you, but——"

Evidently then it was not to claim the immediate return of her loan.

"Dear lady," said Mr. Durham with geniality, "look on me as your Father Confessor. Unburden your mind freely. Tell me everything."

This flattered Miss Jenkins, for Mr. Durham was by no means old, certainly not old enough to be looked on by her in the light of Father Confessor, but the difficulty was that she did not wish to unburden her mind altogether. She did not care to tell the crude facts. On her way to Mr. Durham she had been making up a plausible tale, sufficiently like the truth to pass muster, and to avoid apparent inconsistencies, but at the same time one giving her position an air of greater dignity and solidity than she felt it actually possessed.

"Well, my dear Mr. Durham," she began, after some girlish hesitation, "to be quite candid with you, I have a curious personal narrative to lay before you. May I rely on your discretion and secrecy?"

"Absolutely," said Mr. Durham with solemnity.

"I have told you," went on Miss Jenkins, "that though I am not wealthy, ours is a highly distinguished family. Now amongst the friends of my childhood was a—a nobleman of ancient lineage —a—an earl in short. He paid me a great deal of attention, was devoted to me in fact, but I was then too young to—a—listen seriously to his proposals. We—I—that is, we lost sight of each other for several years, and—and quite by accident I learned recently that a paper *The Comet*——"

"I know it," said Mr. Durham with a frown.

"*The Comet* was offering a—a Prize." Here Miss Jenkins simpered and grew so embarrassed she did not know how to proceed.

"A Prize," repeated Mr. Durham to help her out.

"Yes," said Miss Jenkins with a giggle. "Everybody has been talking about it. Owing to your bereavement perhaps you've not heard. He, it—in short they offered for competition a—a husband, a fortune, and a title, and I learned—no matter how—that he—the Prize in short—was the man who had loved me so desperately in the past, and to whom I confess my affections had turned in our long separation."

"In-deed," said Mr. Durham. "This is quite a romance."

"On that," continued Miss Jenkins, satisfied with the impression she had made, "I thought it would be—be—a rather amusing—er—quite a joke in fact, if I competed with the other girls —and then if — if I won, you know, I could proclaim my identity and — and surprise him, for he—I have reason to believe, he loves me still, but—he—he thought in fact I was false to him."

"Um," said Mr. Durham, "two fond hearts separated by an error. How very sad! And so, naturally, you competed?"

"Yes," said Miss Jenkins delicately. "Of course nothing would have induced me—to—er—compete, but the circumstances, as I have explained, of having previously known, and—a—loved, the gentleman — I mean nobleman, in question, and having been loved by him."

"To be sure!" said Mr. Durham. "I sincerely hope you may win him, my dear lady, and explain to your mutual satisfaction all the misunderstandings that parted you in the past."

"Thank you," said Miss Jenkins. "As a matter of fact I have won him. He communicated the fact to me that my coupon 31,858 was the lucky number."

"Indeed! Then, if so, it is all right."

"Alas! no. That is why I have come to you. You see he is not aware I am the winner. He—he thinks it is someone—a—of the same name—a—a stranger in fact—we had lost sight of each other, as I told you, for quite a number of years. Even if we met, he actually might not remember

me just at first—I was—a—such a child, when we parted."

"Then tell him who you are."

"Oh—I—a—can't just yet. You can appreciate, my dear Mr. Durham, the delicacy of a woman's feelings in such a case. When he knew my coupon had won, he wrote to me at once—thinking me a stranger—and told me—such a nice manly letter, just like him, dear fellow—at least as he used to be. He asked me to meet him yesterday, and—a—mentioned that though his unalterable affection was given to a young lady he had loved when she was a child—me, you see—yet as she had coldly scorned him, and, he was credibly informed, had preferred another, he would try to be a good husband to—me—a—the Prize Winner."

"And so you met him?"

"No. I went to the spot indicated, determined to—er—reveal who I was, and to assure him of a love that had never faltered—but—" and the voice of Miss Jenkins grew tragic, "he didn't come."

"You don't say so!" ejaculated Mr. Durham.

"He did not come," repeated Miss Jenkins hollowly. "What has happened I do not know, but I suspect the machinations of a rival, or treachery on the part of *The Comet*. Now, what am I to do? He has not telegraphed. He has not written. My heart is torn with anguish. . . . Advise me. I am unwilling to think he is in fault, but still I would like him to see that I am not to be trifled with."

"Dear lady," said Mr. Durham, "I have not the faintest doubt the Editor is at the bottom of it. In my opinion there is nothing too base or too bad for editors to do. I approached that fellow, not so long ago, with a scheme of my own, a magnificent scheme, and he scoffed at it, actually scoffed at it. I have the worst opinion of him. In my view you had better take a firm and decided attitude in dealing with such people. It will bring them to their senses. Show them you cannot be swindled with impunity. No doubt they will try to impose on you, seeing they have a lady to deal with."

"Well," said Miss Jenkins, "a curious circumstance occurred last evening. I did not pay much attention to it at the time, but it struck me since as peculiar. While I was waiting, a man of the most forbidding aspect entered into casual conversation with me, at least it seemed casual. What he said, however, was very disquieting. I told him I was expecting a—a friend, and he said something to the effect that there might be a disappointment in store for me, that the man I loved might be unworthy of me, that he might not come at all, and so on. I did not heed him at the time, but seen in the light of subsequent events such remarks seem sinister. Who could he have been? It has struck me since that perhaps he was an emissary of the Editor. If the Editor is the kind of man you say, he may have his own reasons for wishing to give the Prize to someone else. He may have been bought over by another competitor."

"It is extremely probable," said Mr. Durham gravely.

"But he can't, he daren't," cried Miss Jenkins excitedly. "I have my number and the letter all safe. I'll compel him to act fairly."

"Quite right, quite right. I think you had better go at once to the office and insist on seeing the man. Tell him plainly that if any other competitor has bribed him, you will take legal proceedings, and say you will stand no nonsense," advised Mr. Durham.

"Will you not accompany me?" asked Miss Jenkins. "It would be such a comfort to have the support of a man at such a crisis. I may tell you that I have been already at the office to make enquiries, and could get no information, no satisfaction. I saw a young man who said he was the assistant editor, and who told me that neither the Editor nor the Prize was to be seen. I did not like his manner. He seemed to be keeping something back. He told me they would write to me, but what I want is a personal interview. If I return protected by you they will not dare to refuse it."

Mr. Durham swelled out his chest like a pouter pigeon.

"Dear lady, I shall be delighted," he replied. "I think those people should be exposed, and will accompany you with pleasure. By the way, would you have any objection to let me know the name of your — a — friend? The Prize, I mean. It will be quite safe with me."

"His name? Oh!—ah—" said Miss Jenkins, completely taken aback, "I—that is—I am under a solemn promise not to divulge it at present, but will let you know as soon as possible."

And she meant it.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PRIZE AND THE PRIZE WINNER

"WHAT for you, madam?" asked Boyle with a snap, as Miss Jenkins, accompanied by Mr. Durham, presented herself at the glass slide marked 'Enquiries.' One of Boyle's tricks was to pretend not to recognise people he did not like, and compel them to state their business over and over again, no matter how often they called.

"I wish to see the Editor," said Miss Jenkins.

"Will you please fill in your name and business?" He handed her a card. As he did so he recognised Mr. Durham, and gave him a friendly nod. He was hurt by the gentleman's unresponsive gaze.

"What had I better do?" whispered Miss Jenkins.

"Fill it in, dear madam," said Mr. Durham.

"But I'd prefer not to give my name. Would you mind writing yours instead? You can add 'and a lady.'"

"Certainly, certainly," said Mr. Durham with alacrity. Accordingly he wrote 'Archibald Gordon Durham and a lady. Business—In connection with the recent Prize Competition,' and handed it to Boyle.

That young man read it very slowly and deliberately, dropped off his perch, thereby disappearing completely, thrust the card into a little box, pulled a string, and it was whirled up to the ceiling.

The office of *The Comet* had been transformed since Miss Jenkins first beheld it. The whole second floor had been taken in, the outer office enlarged, and instead of a solitary small boy playing with a dog, an army of clerks were occupied at ledgers. There was a brand-new mahogany counter. Every now and then shrill telephone calls rang noisily. All was bustle and hurry. Men tramped in and out continuously with bundles of the paper. There could be no doubt that an era of prosperity had set in.

Presently a shrill whistle sounded. Boyle rushed to the speaking tube.

"Yessir," he cried.

There was a muffled conversation, then the small boy came back.

"Please, the Editor says he is too busy to see anyone this afternoon except by appointment. If you will write your business in full it will receive attention."

"This is a nice way to treat one," cried Miss Jenkins, crimsoning with wrath. "They don't know whom they are dealing with."

"It is intolerable," agreed Mr. Durham.

"I thought he couldn't see you," said Boyle. "Four hundred and seventy people have called to-day."

"Send up word that we must see him," said Miss

Jenkins to Mr. Durham, ignoring Boyle. "What are these people that they should give themselves airs?"

"It won't be any use," said Boyle. "I have my orders. What our guv'nor says, he means, and he isn't a gentleman to be called on casual. He has plenty of other things to do."

"Send up word that you are the Prize Winner," whispered Mr. Durham. "He will have to see you then."

"Oh! I don't like to do that," murmured Miss Jenkins. "If I could see him, it would be different: but all these men in the office would know, and this boy is so shockingly impertinent."

Mr. Durham caught Boyle's eye fixed on Miss Jenkins, and saw his ears straining to catch her words.

"Will you come outside?" he said. "I want to speak to you."

Miss Jenkins obeyed.

"That boy was listening," said Mr. Durham as he closed the door. "There is no use sending messages through him. Take my advice and walk straight in."

"That is what I should like to do," said Miss Jenkins, "but unfortunately I don't know where the Editor is. His office used to be just behind here, but they have thrown the rooms into one."

"Oh, that is easily settled," replied Mr. Durham, nonchalantly approaching a youth who was coming along the corridor with a bundle of proofs in his hand. "Can you tell me," he asked politely," where is the private office of the Editor of *The Comet*?"

"Have you an appointment?" returned the youth suspiciously.

"Yes," replied Mr. Durham promptly.

"Second floor, second door to the right," answered the youth, reassured, and disappeared down the lift whistling.

Miss Jenkins and Mr. Durham mounted and paused a moment at that fateful door to take breath for the encounter. It bore the inscription 'The Editor. Private.'

"You had better enter first," said Mr. Durham. "Don't knock, but walk straight in. You are not at all nervous, I hope. Remember I am here to back your claim."

"Nervous!" ejaculated Miss Jenkins, half turning with a sudden flash of the eye. "Why should I be nervous? I have come to make enquiries, and if necessary to enforce my rights. There is no cause for nervousness."

As she spoke she turned the handle, and advanced into the room. She meant to be very calm but firm.

The first thing her eyes fell on, however, was the burly form of MacCarthy. He stood morosely looking out of the window, with his hands clasped behind his back. As she entered, he turned sharply and stood facing her with dropped jaw, a ludicrous expression of dismay on his countenance.

There was a moment's dreadful silence as the adversaries confronted each other like duellists about to cross swords.

"This confirms my worst fears!" said Miss Jenkins to Mr. Durham. "There *is* a conspiracy.

The person before us is the man who addressed me last night. You see him. The Editor himself!"

She cleared her throat, and spoke with dignity to MacCarthy.

"I have called, sir," she said haughtily, "with my friend Mr. Durham, to demand an explanation at your hands, but without suspecting your identity. You are, I perceive, the Editor of this paper. It does not surprise me! I am, as from your language last night I have no doubt you are aware, the Prize Winner in your recent Competition, and I desire to know by what authority you prevented the nobleman whom I have won, and to whom I consider myself affianced, from keeping his appointment with me yesterday?"

"Madam," said MacCarthy in a shaking voice, "I kept the appointment."

"I am aware you did," said Miss Jenkins with scorn and rising anger. "I am aware that, with what I suppose you consider 'journalistic enterprise,' you intruded on my privacy, forced your conversation on me and prepared me for unparalleled and disgraceful treachery, which I will resist to the death. Why you did it is a mystery to me."

"Madam," replied MacCarthy, "I beg to say I did not force meself on you. You addressed me first."

"Cease quibbling," cried Miss Jenkins in wrath. "I spoke to you merely as to an inoffensive casual stranger whose conversation made no impression on me. I now find you to be the Editor of *The Comet*. Had I not chanced to call I should never

have known the truth. What can I conclude but that some conspiracy is on foot, some trick to deprive me of the Prize I have won? Let me tell you, sir, if you have hatched any such plot it will fail. I will not be trifled with. I have powerful friends. I demand the fulfilment of your bargain. The nobleman wrote to me himself in affectionate terms. He suggested an interview. With you rests the responsibility for having frustrated him. Beware, sir, how you interfere between two loving hearts."

"This is very ridiculous," said MacCarthy, drops of perspiration standing on his forehead. "You are labouring under a misapprehension, madam. I am not the Editor at all."

"Then you hold a more degrading position," flashed Miss Jenkins. "You are his emissary, his satellite, his hireling. No doubt some other competitor has bought his services and yours. Oh! you need not look at me like that. I have heard of such things! But I will have fair play." She flourished her coupon in the Count's face. "I demand to see the Prize nobleman instantly, and learn from his own lips why he failed to keep his appointment."

"Madam," said MacCarthy, "'tis me misfortune to have offended you. I am neither the Editor nor the Editor's hireling. I am the Prize."

If a bombshell had exploded at the feet of Miss Jenkins she could not have looked more astonished.

"You!" she ejaculated incredulously. "The Prize! Impossible! Do not seek, sir, to win my hand by such a contemptible *ruse*. What will you

say when you learn that I have seen the Prize, and so am aware you are uttering a falsehood ? "

At this ugly charge a vivid flush mounted to MacCarthy's forehead, and he took a step forward.

" If you were not a woman, madam," he cried, " you should not say that with impunity."

" Ay ! " said Miss Jenkins bitterly, " threaten me, strike me—do ! I have a protector here who will avenge me if you dare lift your finger."

Mr. Durham, finding nothing to say amidst the flood of Miss Jenkins' eloquence, had hitherto stood behind her, alternately opening and shutting his mouth, in silence. He now advanced and assumed a threatening attitude.

" Come on ! " cried the exasperated MacCarthy. " Come on. You're not a woman inyhow, and I'll be hanged if I'll stand iny of your nonsense. I'd fight four like you."

Mr. Durham made an ineffectual lunge at the Count with his umbrella, but the next instant staggered under a tremendous blow in the chest that took away his breath, sent hat and umbrella flying, and caused his *pince-nez* to bound off his nose. As he was nearly blind without glasses he groped aimlessly around, waving his arms like the sails of a windmill, while the Count danced in front of him, spluttering with wrath, and bidding him ' try again.'

At this instant Jack and Hazlitt, surprised at the noise, rushed in from the adjoining room, and stood looking at the excited group with eyes of astonishment and enquiry.

"What on earth does this mean?" asked Darracott.

The combatants fell apart.

At the sound of his voice Miss Jenkins turned, recognised him whom she believed to be the Prize, saw an opportunity for dramatic action and seized it.

With a shriek she rushed at him.

"Oh, save me, save me!" she cried, flinging her arms round Jack. "Protect me from the violence of that man," and she clung to him.

"Which man? What man?" asked Jack, vainly endeavouring to disentangle himself.

"The Editor," gasped Miss Jenkins. "He wants to come between us, but oh! you will not let him? Say you will not. Be my champion. Show him that his double-dealing, his treachery, is unmasked."

"MacCarthy, what on earth is all this? Who are these persons? Why are you fighting?"

"That lady," said MacCarthy sullenly, "tells me she is the Prize Winner, and this gentleman seems to think she has been wronged in some way. He is anxious to defend her, so I am giving him the opportunity."

"The Prize Winner!" exclaimed Jack. "The deuce she is!"

"Why did you not come?" murmured Miss Jenkins faintly. "Why did you not come? Why did you not meet me as you promised? I expected you. I waited for you at the third bench."

"Great Heaven!" cried Jack, aghast. "MacCarthy, what is the meaning of this? Is she mad?"

"Faith, I think you had better ask the lady," said MacCarthy grimly.

"Madam," said Jack, "what is the meaning of this?"

"Oh, can you ask me? Have you not divined? As that wretch has said, I am the winner in the Competition. Yes, I have won you, and I glory in my Prize. You wrote and asked me to meet you. I consented, for I look on you as virtually my betrothed. He came last night in your place. In the guise of a casual stranger he insinuated that you would not meet me at all, that you were unworthy of me, but I heeded him not. Your haste to communicate with me——"

"Oh, damn!" interjected the Count.

"To communicate with you?" repeated Jack in growing amazement.

"—showed the stamp of your noble mind, and no treacherous friend, no swindling, swearing editor"—with a withering glance at MacCarthy—"can persuade me of aught to your disadvantage."

"Madam, may I explain?" said that gentleman with an air of profound humility and distress.

"No," said Miss Jenkins with authority. "I want no explanations. I will not listen to a word from you. I have drawn my own conclusions. Your very appearance condemns you."

"But if you would only listen."

"I will not listen. You could say nothing that would change my opinion of your conduct. You must have read a letter not meant for your eyes. You intercepted it, and came to woo me for yourself."

"O Lord!" groaned the Count. "This is too much. Sure I never——"

"Be silent, traitor! With you I will have nothing further to do. It is with this gentleman—this nobleman—I have to deal. Is it not . . . dearest?" She uttered the last word in a low voice with diffident hesitation.

"What is your name?" asked Jack, bewildered and alarmed.

"Arethusa," said Miss Jenkins coyly. "Have you forgotten? Your own Arethusa, better known to you perhaps as 'Wood Violet.'"

As she spoke she drew herself up and dropped her eyes with an air of modest pride, then shot at Jack a tender glance that made her look like a coquettish griffin.

"Well!" said Darracott in profound embarrassment, "it really is not with me you have to do, but with this gentleman," and he indicated the Count, who was looking the picture of misery.

"I decline to have anything to do with that—that—creature," said Miss Jenkins with dignity. "To increase the circulation of his miserable paper he made an offer of a Prize to the public, and now I have won that Prize he wishes to evade giving it. No doubt he has his reasons. Do not listen to him. I am here in response to your letter."

"To my letter! There is a mistake on your part."

"There is no mistake. You must . . . you will pardon what may seem like an intrusion when I explain . . . when I tell you of the anxiety I

have suffered since you failed to keep your appointment."

"But I made no appointment. I never wrote to you in my life. I know nothing about you."

"My lord," said Miss Jenkins, with a sudden accession of chilling dignity, "facts are facts. I hold your lordship's letter in my possession."

"I have not written to you," persisted Jack, "and the fact that you call me 'my lord,' shows you have made a mistake. I have no right to the title."

"No right? Then what is your correct title? Are you not an earl?"

"I am not an earl. I have no title."

"No title! No title!" shrieked Miss Jenkins. "And yet you allowed yourself to be advertised in the public press as 'a nobleman of ancient lineage,' able to confer upon your bride the rank of countess! Is your fortune equally mythical?"

"Oh, MacCarthy," groaned Jack, "do explain to this lady that it is you who are the Prize, and not I."

"I have told her already," said the Count, "but sure she won't believe me."

"Because I know better," snapped Miss Jenkins. "My lord, cease this undignified masquerade, I beg of you. I see how it is. With mistaken generosity you are trying to hand me over to your friend, now it has dawned on you he wishes to gain my hand himself, but I will not allow the sacrifice. Away with foolish hesitancy. It is on you I have bestowed my affections, and on you alone—I confess it. I will never be another's. You think

perhaps I have not seen you before, but I have, and I know for a fact it is you who are the Prize."

Mr. Durham by this time had recovered his breath and found his *pince-nez*. He now came forward and laid his hand appealingly on the arm of the excited claimant.

"My dear Miss Jenkins," he said soothingly, "in your own interests would it not be better to put an end to this mystery? . . . to explain to . . . a . . . this . . . a . . . gentleman . . . who now insists he is not a nobleman . . . that you have known him of old . . . that in fact, though he may not recognise you, yet in your youth . . . and, ah! his . . . though I confess he still looks quite young . . . there were tender passages between you which give you a claim to——"

"Hold your tongue. Let me manage my own affairs!" cried Miss Jenkins angrily. She had quite forgotten Mr. Durham's presence, and the story she had told him of her old-time acquaintance with the Prize.

Mr. Durham shrugged his shoulders, and marvelling at her folly and the obtuseness of the Prize in not recognising her, retreated, smiling rather foolishly.

"What tender passages?" said Jack. "What claim? What is your friend saying? What does he mean? I never laid eyes on you before in my life, or at least——" A sudden inconvenient flash of recollection crossed his mind, and he paused, for as he spoke he remembered having heard her sing at Mrs. Golightly Carter's 'At Home.' Mr. Durham saw his hesitation, momentary though

it was, and concluded that slumbering memory was awakening.

"It does not matter," said Miss Jenkins with some embarrassment and a good deal of exasperation. "That is not the point. At any rate I know you are the Prize; so please have the frankness to admit your identity, and cease to deny your title."

"I assure you I am not," cried Jack.

"But I can prove it," said Miss Jenkins, "prove it by a witness close at hand, by a witness in the employment of the paper. Do you still venture to deny it?"

"Impossible," said Jack. "To start with, no one in the office was told who was the Prize, but they all know that at least *I* am not he. You must be mistaken."

"Well," cried Miss Jenkins, with desperate calmness and determination, "let us have him up and question him. He is young and impertinent, but he is intelligent, and knows, I daresay, the nature of an oath. Mr. Durham, will you kindly fetch the office-boy?"

"Stay," said Otto, "I will call him," and he walked to the speaking tube.

As he passed the Count he whispered, "I think I see a way out, but for Heaven's sake agree to anything I say." MacCarthy nodded miserably. Then the party stood in awkward silence awaiting the entrance of Boyle.

"Tell me, child," cried Miss Jenkins, in great excitement, "who is this gentleman? Is he not the Prize offered in the Matrimonial Competition?"

Boyle surveyed her quietly, then he looked at Jack.

"Am I to answer her, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly," said Darracott.

"Since you want to know," returned Boyle with his most grown-up manner, "he is not. That, madam, is our guv'nor, the Editor of *The Comet*," and he indicated Jack by a wave of the hand.

Miss Jenkins gave a shriek of dismay.

"Oh, what wickedness!" she cried. "You dreadful boy! Did you not tell me distinctly when I called here before that this man was the Prize? You remember perfectly. I saw him through the door."

"I did," said Boyle briefly, "but then I was lying."

"Lying. Gracious heavens! Why?"

"Why, to keep you from dashing in on top of the guv'nor wen he said he wasn't to be disturbed."

"But how am I to know you are not lying now?" asked Miss Jenkins suspiciously. "It's my belief that you are. You told me distinctly he was an earl. You are in a conspiracy. I saw that man smile at you, I did. You little villain! How dare you not tell the truth?" and she shook Boyle with all her strength, till he suddenly wriggled out of his jacket and left her with the garment in her hands.

"Stop that!" he panted angrily.

"If you are terrorised by these men, my boy," said Mr. Durham blandly, "remember that I will protect you, so do not fear to speak the truth."

"Terrorised your grandmother!" said Boyle

rudely. "What d'you take me for? I'm telling the truth now at any rate."

"I don't believe a word you say," cried Miss Jenkins, flinging the jacket at him. "The whole thing is scandalous. A more shameful attempt to swindle and defraud an innocent and helpless woman was never made. I will expose it, I will——"

"But I do assure you, my dear madam," said Otto, "the whole Competition is entirely fair and above-board. We are willing to abide in every particular by the promises we have made. Are we not, MacCarthy?"

The Count dumbly syllabled something that seemed to be "Buy her off," but he caught Otto's eye, and said "Ye . . . es," with a groan.

"That gentleman before you," pursued Otto, "is the Prize. He is in all respects what we described him to be. He can make you a countess, for he is a count. He is ready to marry you." The Count gulped. "Will you take him?"

"Take that . . . that monster? That impostor? Not I," cried Miss Jenkins, in fierce anger. "If you"—turning to Jack—"false to all your solemn obligations, false to the traditions of your rank, a traitor to me who trusted you, persist in confounding yourself with him and refuse to carry out your contract, I will not have an editor foisted on me. What is the man to you that you should be concerned to secure his happiness rather than yours and mine? But I will compel you to do me justice. You shall carry out your printed and published promise to the letter, or I will know the reason why."

"Don't you think," said Otto quietly, "that if we arranged to make you handsome compensation for any trouble and annoyance to which you have been put, if we give you a substantial sum—say two thousand pounds——"

"Do you dare to offer me a paltry two thousand pounds?" shrieked Miss Jenkins. "I reject it with scorn. No, sir, I will have all or nothing. I shake the dust of this office from my feet, and go to consult my solicitor."

Suiting the action to the word she rushed from the room, followed more closely by Mr. Durham, who, between the raging Irishman that assailed him and the lady who ignored him after asking his support, felt he had involved himself in a very awkward affair.

"She talked too much," he said to himself as he hastened downstairs in the wake of Miss Jenkins. "Far too much. If she had only left the matter in my hands I'd have settled it amicably. It was madness not to have recalled their former acquaintance, madness, but she would not let me say a word."

"By George!" cried the Count, when Miss Jenkins had left the room. "That was a great idea of yours entirely. Me heart was in me mouth when you made me say I was ready to marry her."

"It was an inspiration," said Hazlitt complacently. "Now that she has rejected you before witnesses, it seems to me the whole affair is at an end."

"Ouf!" exclaimed the Count, emitting a long breath. "What a relief."

"Don't be too sure," said Jack. "If she gets into the hands of a sharp solicitor there may be more trouble in store."

"Faith, you're a Job's comforter," said MacCarthy.

CHAPTER XXV

THE LAW AND THE LADY

THE instructions given by Miss Jenkins to her solicitors, to whom, having bade Mr. Durham farewell, she drove at a white heat, were somewhat indefinite. For one thing, she did not know the name of the Prize nobleman, the fulfilment of whose public promise of marriage she exacted. In her excitement, and in the confusion between two men, she had forgotten to ask it. To Messrs. Smiffkin and Fry she made no pretence of previous acquaintance with the Prize, but told the story pretty much as it occurred, for the very good reason that she knew the firm would be sure to find out the truth.

The lawyers did not appear to think the case as simple as it looked to their client. She was surprised to find that they did not see their way to calling in a policeman, and securing then and there the committal to prison of the offending persons.

At the same time they wrote on her behalf to the Editor of *The Comet* requesting that justice might be done her. Both Jack and the Count accordingly saw the solicitors, proved their separate individuality to the satisfaction of those gentlemen,

and showed how the mistake on the part of Miss Jenkins had arisen. As the solicitors were respectable persons blinded by no romance, and no preconceived notions, they allowed themselves to be convinced by evidence, and having written to their client a full, true, and particular account of the affair, added that they awaited her further instructions.

Miss Jenkins was frantic. She drove over post haste and overwhelmed the partners with reproaches, insinuating that they had been bought by the Editor's gold. She had as wonderful an idea of the wealth, malice, and ubiquity of her enemies as a war advocate. A great deal of time, patience, and eloquence were necessary on the part of Mr. Fry to convince the lady of her error. He was, however, so persuasive, so earnest in advising her not to cast aside the substance for the shadow, a real for an imaginary good; he pointed out so deftly the Irishman's real superiority to Jack, the difference between plain Mr. Darracott and Count MacCarthy de Burgo, that he sent the lady home in tears, admitting that she must have been mistaken. Mr. Fry proved that the letter to Miss Jenkins was in the Count's handwriting, not in Jack's, and volunteered the opinion that it probably was natural timidity that had prevented the Count from making himself known as the Prize when he kept the appointment.

The reflections on Miss Jenkins were bitter. By unparalleled ill-luck she had, it appeared, insulted and rejected the Prize. True, she thought of Jack with lingering regret. What a pity that he was

but an untitled editor! Still, if she continued to fix her affections on him, what would it profit her?

As she cooled she reflected that the Count had his points. He was a fine figure of a man. Jack looked like a lath beside him. After all, she reasoned, what she primarily wanted was to be married, and secondarily to bear a title. She had held both ambitions within her grasp and had thrown them away. What madness!

After two days of terrible indecision, during which what Miss Jenkins called her 'affections' veered gradually round from Jack to the Count, she resolved to write to MacCarthy, apologise, retract, and accept him as a suitor. Like her friend Mr. Durham, she had an idea that she excelled as a correspondent, and she had every hope of retrieving her error. Accordingly she composed the following letter:—

"SIR,—By a *painful* mistake as to your *identity* I was led on the occasion of our recent interview to address you in terms which I *heartily regret*, and have since found were *totally misapplied*. Will you forgive me? My *grief*, *shame*, and CONFUSION are *overwhelming*. I feel assured that you are *too much of a gentleman* to harbour resentment when I so *fully* and *freely apologise*. Pray consider *all* my hasty words *unsaid*. They were spoken under a sense of wrong (*erroneous I admit*) but surely not inexcusable? On my part *I am ready to revert* to the state of things existing between us *before my unfortunate error*, for which I am sure

you will *generously* admit there was some excuse. Will you not give me a *speedy* opportunity of *seeing* you? Then I will explain to your *satisfaction the misapprehension* on my part. I have every hope of regaining the place in your *regard* and *esteem* which I may for a brief space have forfeited by my *impulsive speech* and action.

"Believe me, dear Sir, with the *deepest regret*,
"ARETHUSA E. JENKINS ('Wood Violet'),
"Prize Winner, M.C. *The Comet*.
"Coupon 31,858."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE POLITE LETTER-WRITER

In no conciliatory frame of mind did Count MacCarthy de Burgo receive and peruse the communication from Miss Jenkins.

"Gracious Powers! Darracott," he exclaimed, when he had read the apologetic communication. "What on earth am I to do? That terrible woman has written to express her sorrow for all she said the other day."

"So well she may," said Jack. "I'm glad she has had so much sense."

"But that's not all," said the Count with a groan. "She not only apologises, she withdraws. See here, she says, 'I am ready to revert to the state of things existing between us before my unfortunate error.' Now what the deuce does she mean by that?"

"I presume she means that, having discovered you really are the Prize, and a genuine Count, she has changed her mind, and desires to express her willingness to marry you."

"Oh, but I won't marry her," said the Count. "I'll be hanged if I will. No, Darracott, in the name of God, I say again, let her take the money.

I've been a poor man all me life, and faith I'll die sooner than consent. I'll write to her this minute and offer her the lot. I'll put the thing as nicely as I can, but I'll make me meaning clear."

"Take my advice, my friend, and write no more," said Jack. "Your too ready pen brought her on you in the first instance."

"'Tis true," said the Count; "but, man, what am I to do? She'll be coming here next thing, an' I won't be taken alive. Sure it isn't over a thrifle of money I'd hesitate at such a crisis."

"He calls forty thousand pounds a trifle," said Jack.

"So it is," cried the Count, "compared with the misfortune it might avert. Offer it to her. I'll be pleased and happy if she takes it."

"My dear Mac," said Jack, "let me manage this. I fancy Miss Jenkins can be bought off if we work with dexterity."

The Count wrung his hand with fervour.

"Do what you like," he exclaimed. "I'll agree. Make iny suggestion. I'll carry it out, so long as you make it clear to her that she can't have me."

"If you take my advice," said Jack, "you'll neither see her nor communicate with her. Let all correspondence be conducted by Brown and Gray. She does not know your private address, and the hall-porter has orders not to admit her, so you are pretty safe. I will instruct the solicitors to say you accept her apology, but that you cannot

allow matters to revert to their former state. Your offer is now withdrawn. You beg, however, to offer the sum of—what shall we say—two hundred pounds——"

"Oh! make it double," said the Count. "Sure I don't want to be mean; I'll work it out by degrees in contributions to *The Comet*."

"I think two hundred pounds will meet the situation," said Jack, "but to please you we'll say three. Three hundred pounds then, on condition that she withdraws her claims, and never molests you in future."

"And now what about the wretched Prize money? It is worrying me to death. Hadn't we better return it at once?"

"You seem in a great hurry to get rid of it," said Jack.

"I am, for sure I have no right to it now, and the sooner the affair is settled the better."

A letter was accordingly despatched by Messrs. Brown and Gray on behalf of Count MacCarthy de Burgo which, while couched in the most considerate language, refused to go back to the condition of things previous to the ill-advised visit of Arethusa, and offered her three hundred pounds down to withdraw all claims.

Miss Arethusa chose to regard herself an injured woman. She took no notice of the solicitors and wrote direct to the Count.

"Another," said the Count, when he saw the too well-known handwriting. "What does she say now? When it comes to dealing with that woman, it's not a man I am but a mouse."

"SIR,—I *cannot express* the *grief* and *pain* with which I received a *communication, purporting to* express your views on the relations between us. *How you have changed* since the first *ardent* expression of your affection and joy in winning me woke an echo in my breast! Why is this? True, under a misapprehension as to your identity I spoke words that were perhaps hurtful to your feelings, but these I have apologised for and withdrawn. You have taken no notice of my request for a *personal* interview, during which I should have had an opportunity of clearing myself, of *explaining*, and *atoning* for my *error*. This is cruel!! I should not have thought that one whose *virtues* have been so *highly praised* would treat a *poor weak* woman thus. Sir, you do not know my soul! No offer of money compensation can atone for a slight to my *deepest and holiest feelings*, my *noblest* aspirations! It is not for a miserable sum of £300 (three hundred pounds) that I will consent that all shall be at an end between us. I am ready to fulfil MY part in the contract and expect you to carry out *yours*. The choice lies with me, the Prize Winner, and I *elect to stand by your published promises*. You will not, you *cannot*, be so *degraded*, so *unworthy* of your *rank* and *birth* as to *repudiate* them. I beg to assure you, moreover, that if (contrary to my expectations) you should refuse to carry out your word, two thousand pounds will not compensate me. My desire is to approach you with the *love* and *affection* due to my *betrothed*. If, however, you should prove, which I cannot believe, so BASE, as to endeavour

in some paltry way to evade carrying out your engagement, you shall find that a *deeply injured* woman may claim the protection of the law. Oh, do not drive me to extremities, but permit me to sign myself what I hope yet in reality to be,

"Your own

"ARETHUSA."

"I'm done for this time," said the Count. "Sure she won't take compensation, what resource have I? Why didn't you say four hundred? I wanted to offer her four hundred, Darracott, you know I did."

"It would have been all the same," said Jack. "She is flying at higher game."

"'The protection of the law.' What does she mean by that now? I hate the law."

"I suppose she intends to sue you."

"To sue me!" The Count bounded on his chair. "The divil she does! Then I'll be ruined. Oh, why did I? Why did I ever enter into such a thing? Sure the love of money is the root of all evil. I've proved it. There is nothing before me but flight."

"Is it possible you have forgotten that she refused you solemnly before us all?" said Jack. "Pull yourself together, man. Once she did that, she had no further claim on you, and if you offered her money it was only out of kindness."

The Count brightened somewhat.

"So she did," he said. "So she did. Sure she called me a monster and a swindler, but faith,

she seems to be going on with the thing all the same."

"Very well," said Jack. "We'll get Brown and Gray to write back and say that as she rejected you in presence of three—no, four—respectable witnesses, one of them a friend of her own, you consider yourself released from any promise or obligation towards her whatever, expressed or implied, and that you withdraw your offer of three hundred pounds."

"Oh, no," cried the Count, "I won't say that. Let her have the three hundred and welcome, if it's mine to give. I'll just keep to the refusal and the witnesses."

"Please yourself," said Jack, "but I advise you to withdraw the offer of money or she will take it as a sign of weakness. Lose no time. Be off now to the solicitors, and mind they make it quite clear that she refused you."

For two whole days the Count was his old joyous self. He whistled as he walked, tipped Boyle, and behaved as if he had not a care. His gaiety, however, was woefully checked by the receipt of another communication from Miss Jenkins, which ran thus :—

"SIR,—With *scorn* and *contempt* I received the announcement that *no spark* of *gentlemanly feeling* remains in your breast. *Dead* to all sentiments of *honour, chivalry, and affection*, you decline to carry out *your promise* to *marry me, publicly and repeatedly made*, and endeavour by the plea that I *refused* you, to evade the *punishment justly due* to your *crime*.

"*Wounded* as I am, *stricken* to the *heart*, I rise with a strength not my own in defence of my rights. *Weak woman* though I be, the *laws* of *England* will protect me. Your plea, sir, *ingenious* as it sounds, will be of no avail in a land where *even-handed justice* is the *due* of the lowliest. Your *perjury* will be *punished* as it deserves. You have taken advantage of my mistake, but it *remains to be seen* whether my rejection of your offer *will hold good in law, in view* of the *incontestable* fact that it was made in error. I refused—I meant to refuse—the hand *not* of the genuine Prize, Count MacCarthy de Burgo, *but* the hand of the man whom I *believed* to be *a mere Editor*. It was a *misapprehension!* and I *feel assured* that the *law will not uphold* it. At any rate, I will test the matter. If *justice* is refused me in one court, I will go into a *higher*, and, if needs be, will carry my *wrongs* to the *foot of the throne* itself.

"I am, sir, and ever have been, READY to ESPOUSE the NOBLEMAN *offered* as a *Prize* by *The Comet*. YOU ARE HE, and *His Majesty's* JUDGES must *decide* between us, as I am DETERMINED to clear myself.

"The deeply injured,
"ARETHUSA E. JENKINS ('Wood Violet'),
"Prize Winner, M. Competition.
"Coupon 31,858.

"P.S.—You would not have sought to bribe me by the offer of three hundred pounds if you had not known that your case was weak, and desired to buy me off.—A. E. J., Prize Winner.

"P.P.S.—You shall hear from my solicitor to-morrow.—A. E. J.

"P.P.P.S.—I am giving you twenty-four hours to decide. A wire to the Athene Club, if favourable, will arrest proceedings.—A. E. J., Prize Winner."

CHAPTER XXVII

A FRESH CLAIM

MISS JENKINS meant business. Messrs. Smiffkin and Fry did not seem inclined to pursue her claim, so she promptly went to Sharpe and Treadwell, a less scrupulous firm. She would thrash the matter out, she declared. She would fight to the bitter end.

As stated by Messrs. Sharpe and Treadwell, Miss Jenkins had a strong case. The only embarrassment experienced by the lady was through the evident desire of the firm to make sure of their costs, whichever way the trial went. A visit from Mr. Durham, who called at the request of Miss Jenkins, and speaking quite like a man of sense, assured the partners in his most imposing manner that she was a lady of considerable private means, with an interest in a flourishing periodical, persuaded them that it was worth while to throw all their energy into her cause.

Accordingly one day as the Count was breakfasting at his lodgings, a perky young man was shown in.

"Count MacCarthy de Burgo?" he enquired.

"I am he," said the Count suspiciously. "What do you want with me?"

"I come, sir, from Messrs. Sharpe and Treadwell, to serve you with this document on behalf of our client Miss Jenkins."

"A writ?" exclaimed the Count.

"Yes, sir, in the action for Breach of Promise of Marriage which is pending. Jenkins *versus* MacCarthy de Burgo. Damages claimed, twenty thousand pounds."

The Count jumped up in a rage.

"Get out of me sight, you wretched pettifogger!" he cried. "How dare you intrude on a gentleman?" He advanced with clenched fist, but suddenly found himself facing a closed door. The perky young man had vanished.

The Count seized his hat, jammed it on his head, and strode as fast as his long legs could carry him towards the office of *The Comet*. Was ever man in so unpleasant, so ridiculous a position? This nightmare of a woman would neither be bought off nor listen to reason. What abominable legal complications might not now result?

He burst into the office, full of his grievance, but before he could utter a word, Jack cried, holding out a letter—

"MacCarthy! by all that's lucky! I was about to wire for you. Read that!"

"I can't," said the Count agitatedly, "don't talk to me. That infernal woman—God forgive me—is at it again. It's to law she's going now in earnest. Twenty thousand pounds damages, if you please, for breach of promise. May the divil fly away with her. She has me heart-scalded! I insist, Darracott, on your returning that Prize

money instantly, and telling the world, Miss Jenkins and her solicitors included, that it is a beggar I am, without a penny of me own to pay damages if she gets them. Tell her it's no good prosecuting me. She'll have nothing to gain by it. I . . . I . . ."

"Here is some news may calm you," said Jack quietly. "There's another claimant in the field."

"Eh! What! Merciful heavens! what's that you say?" cried the Count, dropping into a chair. "Another claimant! As if one was not enough! Who is it? What do you mean? Oh! I'm distracted!"

"Read the letter," said Jack.

"Faith, I can't see a line," said the Count. "'Tis too excited I am. Read it yourself, and don't be keeping me in suspense."

"It is from a lady who declares she is the owner of the ticket 31,858, and therefore entitled to the Prize."

"Thirty-wün thousand eight hundred and fifty-eight!" ejaculated the Count. "But how can that be? This female, the Violet woman, owns it, worse luck. I saw it in her hand. She brought it with her."

"And this writer says it is hers," repeated Jack.

"More misfortunes," cried the Count. "Well, let them all come. Let a dozen of them come. Death before marriage. Sure a man can die but once. I'm prepared for the worst."

"Do you call it a misfortune?" said Jack.

"What else is it? If one claimant is so bad, what will two be?"

"Considerably better, I fancy. They can fight for you. You need take no notice of Miss Jenkins or her threats till the ownership of the winning number is decided."

"Upon me soul, if this new woman is iny worse than 'Wood Violet,' it'll be a hard case," said the Count more calmly. "Here, let me see the letter."

As Jack had announced, it was from a lady who said she had seen by the papers that ticket No. 31,858 had won the Prize in the Matrimonial Lottery started by *The Comet*, and as she was the owner of that coupon she claimed to be the winner. The letter was signed 'Iowa Shortland Dobbs.'

"I believe I've met her somewhere," said Jack. "I seem to recall the name, and if I remember rightly she was not a bad sort of woman, rather nice-looking too."

"I don't care a straw," said the Count. "I want to have no more to do with women. I've had enough of them. Jenkins is a host in herself. And as to that money, Darracott, I insist on it being given back. Sure, it's because Arethusa thinks I have money that she's prosecuting. If we show her I haven't a penny she may find that the game is not worth the candle."

"But remember if this woman's contention is true," said Otto, "Arethusa is not the Prize Winner. In all cases let us enquire into the claim. I will write and ask to see the coupon at once, and will require particulars of purchase and so on. If there has been a mistake, it will be to your advantage."

"I don't see it," said the Count gloomily. "It will only raise a second woman, perhaps as bad as the first.'

"The more the merrier," said Otto. "There is safety in numbers, and probably you will find anyone easier to deal with than 'Wood Violet.' Take no notice of the writ until we hear further."

CHAPTER XXVIII

A FRESH CLAIMANT

MRS. SHORTLAND DOBBS was still at Bournemouth, shaking off the ill effects of influenza. The balmy air, the blue sky, the sea breezes, the clean, wholesome smell of the pine woods, all cheered and strengthened her. The hotel was comfortable, and had quite a number of the modern improvements without which she considered no house endurable. Her room faced south, was heated with hot air, and had a bed abundantly supplied with blankets. Her health grew better every day. With returning health came renewed cheerfulness. The place was full of visitors, she met some pleasant people, and soon began to feel that life was worth living. Her appetite improved rapidly, her eyes ceased to water, she lingered on in England, no longer distasteful to her, and by degrees resumed her ordinary occupations.

It was during this pleasing period of convalescence that she one day picked up *The Comet* in the hotel reading-room, and suddenly remembered the Matrimonial Competition. It had been its most important feature at the time she fell ill. There was not a word about it now, but the paper had that inde-

scribably flourishing, assured air that comes to newspapers, as to individuals, with prosperity.

"That Prize must be fixed by this, I opine," said Mrs. Dobbs to herself. "I guess I'll find out what number won. I had forgotten all about it."

On enquiry she found a file of *The Comet* at the local library, and turning back discovered that shortly after she had been stricken down with influenza the Matrimonial Prize had been declared to have been won by ticket 31,858. As she read the face of Mrs. Shortland Dobbs was a study.

"My!" she exclaimed, "if that ain't my number. Ain't it just too lucky for anything! And to think that I never knew! Why, if I hadn't happened into this room to-day, and sat down to look at the news, I might never have heard a word about it. It's funny. They must think it real queer no one has claimed the nobleman. P'raps it's just as well there was some delay, so that the thing might not be too public. Folks'll have forgotten a bit."

Accordingly Mrs. Shortland Dobbs sat down to indite a letter to the Editor of *The Comet*, saying she was the owner of the winning coupon No. 31,858, apologising on the score of illness for not having written sooner.

A reply reached her by return of post requesting to see the coupon.

Highly delighted, filled with pleasing imaginings as to her future state, and speculations as to what dazzling position she might yet assume, Mrs. Shortland Dobbs hastened to the carefully locked jewel-case in which she kept her treasures, and

extracted a folded slip of paper lying under her very best and most resplendent diamond necklace. She opened and glanced at it. An expression of dismay burst from her lips. It was exactly what she expected to see with the exception of the number, but that number was somehow mysteriously changed. Instead of 31,858 she held in her hand No. 22,222.

Within half an hour Mrs. Shortland Dobbs was seated in a first-class railway carriage steaming up to town, the unlucky coupon in the reticule which, like all travelling Americans, she carried at her side.

"It's real nice my seeing you here," she said to Jack, when she had been duly shown in at the office, "and finding you to be the Editor. I remember so well meeting you at Mrs. Golightly Carter's. You may be *a* mossel surprised to hear my business. The fact is, Mr. Darracott, when I heard of that Competition business advertised in your paper I caught on to it. Seemed to me like a good idea, something like what our smart pressmen at home would do, and . . . and just for fun, you know, I bought a ticket. What d'ye call it? a coo-pone?"

"Indeed?"

"I did so. Being sick with the *grippe* I forgot all about it, and then on looking at the paper yesterday I found I'd won the thing, as my ticket was thirty-one thousand eight hundred and fifty-eight. So I wrote off to you. On getting your answer, for reasons which I'll presently explain, I thought it better to call at once."

"But another competitor has already brought that very coupon to the office and claimed the Prize. That is why we asked you to produce the coupon."

"Exactly what I expected to hear, but I am an Amurr'can, sir, I'm proud to say, and will not be defrauded of my rights. The woman is either a receiver or a thief. That ticket, sir," went on Mrs. Shortland Dobbs decidedly, "was mine. I took a note of the number. I showed it to a friend, and kin prove it. It has since been stolen from my jewel-case and replaced by this, which is not mine." She flourished a slip of paper drawn from her reticule.

"But, as I told you, someone else claims that coupon," said Jack. "A lady has been here with it. A friend of mine actually saw the number. Can you be mistaken?"

"Not much," said Mrs. Dobbs. "Not likely. You tell me the name of that lady, Mr. Darracott, and maybe I'll be able to tell you *the* name of the thief that stole my coo-pone."

"I don't know whether I ought," said Jack, "but I'm inclined to do so under the circumstances. The person who claims to have won the Prize is a Miss Arethusa Jenkins."

"Miss Jenkins," cried Mrs. Dobbs. "My land! who'd have thought it?"

"Do you know her?" exclaimed Jack.

"Know her? I should smile! Oh, this accounts for it. This is why she hurried me down to Bournemouth and advised me to go home to 'Murrica right away. This is why she packed my trunks

and helped me all she knew. She was just looking 'raound for whatever was loose . . . and I thought her my friend. Wa-al, of all the frauds! That woman is positively the limit."

"If you can prove what you say," said Jack, "no one will be better pleased to hear it than the man who consented to act as the Prize."

"You bet I kin prove it," said Mrs. Dobbs. "There's no mistake 'bout that. Right up to the hilt I kin prove it. The newsman that sold it will remember me; Mrs. Coates, the friend I showed it too, wrote down the number for me, and she kin swear to that. Here is the notebook she wrote it in. As for that Jenkins woman, just you confront her with me, and you'll see. If it was anyone else I'd not so much mind, but she took *a* mean advantage of my lying there sick, and I can't get over that. I handed her all my keys, same as if she was my sister."

"She must be communicated with at once," said Jack.

"Now as to the Prize," said Mrs. Shortland Dobbs in a business-like way. "I s'pose as I've won the man I'd better see him, not that I've made up my mind to take him unless I like him. I'm real independent, Mr. Darracott. I don't want no slouch for my second husband. Dobbs he was a smart mahn. I ain't a young girl, and I know my own mind, so if your ar-istocrat don't suit, I'll just say so. No nobleman shall live on my dollars."

"Certainly," said Jack. "I may say that my friend is himself of an independent nature. He is

now threatened with an action at law because he has refused under any conditions to marry Miss Jenkins."

"That's in his favour," said Mrs. Dobbs promptly. "Say now, what title does he bear?"

"He is a count."

"A count. My! ain't that real nice. I always did want to be a countess. I hope, Mr. Darracott, he is not haughty. I have heard in the States that British ar-istocrats stare, and make folks writhe under the lash of caste. Now I am a free-born Amurrican woman, and I will not suffer anyone to make me writhe."

"He would not dream of it," said Jack with a smile. "He is the simplest fellow going, and as for staring, why, he'll hardly look at a lady."

"Has he haughty relations?" asked Mrs. Dobbs, "who, brought up amidst effete institutions, may not welcome a simple republican into their circle?"

"So far as I know, save his mother and some distant cousins he has no relations at all," said Jack.

"And his fam'ly? Is it as old as John Shortland, or Lackland, or whatever you call him?"

"Immeasurably older. Compared with his ancient race," said Jack solemnly, "John Lackland was but a parvenu."

"Do you tell me so?" said Mrs. Shortland Dobbs, much impressed.

"If you will permit me," said Darracott, "I will let him answer for himself."

Touching a bell, he desired Boyle to summon Count MacCarthy de Burgo, with the result that, after an animated interview, a cab was called, and the three principally concerned drove off to the lodgings of Miss Jenkins.

CHAPTER XXIX

MISS JENKINS HAS VISITORS

"I THINK," said Jack to Mrs. Shortland Dobbs, when they stopped at 61 Camomile Street, "it would be better for you to remain in the cab, and allow Count MacCarthy and myself to see the lady. If your presence becomes necessary, he will fetch you."

"That's a nice little woman," was the verdict of the Count on Mrs. Shortland Dobbs, as the two men knocked at the door, "as nice a little woman, begad, as ever I met, though she does speak a bit through her nose. She has got sense. Faith, I may be lucky after all."

About the hall of 61 Camomile Street hung that concentrated essence of byegone mutton chops, so characteristic of lodging and boarding houses. The grimy handmaiden, successor to 'Liza, bade the visitors walk upstairs to the drawing-room, and without further ceremony plunged into the depths of the kitchen. They mounted accordingly, and receiving no response to repeated knocks, walked in.

"I suppose you have come," said Miss Jenkins, "in answer to a document forwarded by my solicitors?"

"Partly," said Jack. "We desire to speak with you on that and other matters."

"If Count MacCarthy de Burgo has come to say that he regrets his conduct," replied Miss Jenkins sweetly, "he will find me ready to forgive and forget. I am only too glad to find that he repents."

"Repent, ma'am!" broke in the Count impetuously. "Divil a bit I repent."

"If not," remarked Miss Jenkins tartly, "what brings you here, and how dare you use such language in the presence of a lady?"

"I beg your pardon," said the Count, "it slipped out in the heat of the moment."

"Then are you prepared to fulfil your solemn contract?"

"We desire first of all, madam, to know where you got the coupon inscribed with the winning number?" said Jack.

"Where I got—the winning number?" stammered Miss Jenkins, completely taken aback. "Why—of course I got it in the usual way. As anyone else would. I bought it."

"Then no doubt you can give me proof of that?"

"Proof,—what do you mean? Have you not my word, sir?"

"Yes, but can you give any evidence in corroboration of your statement? The name and address of the newsvendor, for instance, and the name of any person who saw the coupon in your possession previous to the publication of the winning number?"

"I—I—— As to the name and address of the newsvendor," said Miss Jenkins haughtily, "I

really do not trouble about such matters, and I was hardly likely to show the coupon to anyone."

"Then you can offer no proof that it was in your possession previous to the —th of last —— ?"

"You have my word, I repeat," said Miss Jenkins loftily, "and that is sufficient. I never told a lie."

At this the Count gave utterance to a queer sound, half grunt, half laugh. Miss Jenkins turned on him fiercely.

"What is the meaning of this interrogatory ?" she asked. "You and I are the principals in this matter. I will not be questioned by this person."

"Pray pardon me," said Jack. "As Editor of *The Comet* the matter concerns me in an equal degree. It is my place to see that the conditions are fairly carried out, and another competitor states that she is the real owner of the winning number."

"Nonsense !" cried Miss Jenkins, turning very red. "I have it in my possession now. I can show it to you if you wish."

"Thank you. I have already seen it in your hands. The question is, when did it come into your possession ?"

"Oh ! ages ago. When the competition was first announced."

"Can you fix the exact date ?"

"I can't," said Miss Jenkins pettishly; "and now if you have finished questioning me, will you kindly go ? I have other things to attend to."

"I fear we must press the matter further," said Jack. "The other competitor has furnished

us with the date of purchase, the name and address of the newsagent, and the name and address of a friend who copied down the number for her in a book at the time. What have you to say to that ? "

" That I don't believe a word of it. This is only another trick to defraud me of my rights. If the other competitor has the winning number let her show it."

" She says it was stolen from her."

" Indeed ! " said Miss Jenkins with a snort, " a likely story. If she ever had it, who could have taken it or who would have bothered ? Until the Prize was drawn one number was as good as another."

" She seems to think you took it, the very day the winning number was printed."

" How dare you ! How dare you ! " screamed Miss Jenkins. " I'll have you prosecuted for libel. I'll persecute—I'll prosecute you. How dare you and this anonymous slanderer traduce me ! "

" Pardon, madam," said the Count, who had grown crimson at this speech. " I may bring a counter action against you for . . . for . . . well, for endeavouring to marry me by false pretences."

" You had better bring in the lady," said Jack quietly to the Count, who left Miss Jenkins raging, and promptly reappeared with Mrs. Shortland Dobbs on his arm. Miss Jenkins shrank back when she saw her.

" You claim, I understand, Mrs. Dobbs," said Jack, " the ownership of the winning coupon ? "

"That's so, sir," said Mrs. Dobbs promptly. "The number was written down in my note-book at the time of purchase by *a* friend. I put the coo-pone away in my jewel-case and locked it in myself. The key was never out of my possession but twice, that I'll swear, once when I asked Miss Jenkins here to put away my di'mond necklet, and once when she was helping me pack."

"Woman!" cried Miss Jenkins, "I repel your base insinuation with indignation. I am a lady."

"Woman," responded Mrs. Shortland Dobbs, "I do not insinuate, I state. You took that coo-pone, Arethusa Jenkins, and you know it. Like as not you spied it out the first time I guv you the key, and you fixed up the number. Then when you saw it had won the Prize, you came right over and cavorted 'raound and advised me go straight away to home and so on, and helped me pack just same as if you was a friend. I see it all now. You slipped out my coo-pone and you slipped in your own, when I was too ill to notice what you were doing. But justice is justice and right is right. I ain't that keen set on winning the Prize. You're a heap more anxious; still if it's my ticket won, I'll see I'm treated fair."

"This is a scandal," burst out Miss Jenkins, "a base libel. You're all in league together. It is a swindle. I have his letter, oh! oh!" and she became hysterical.

"Don't mind her," said Mrs. Dobbs, "and she'll come raound. She treated me scandalously, and I her friend."

"I tell you what," cried Miss Jenkins, sitting up

and speaking with complete self-possession and much spite. "You think you've got rid of me very cleverly, but you are mistaken. That man there who wrote me his deceiving letter thinks perhaps it is all right, but I'll let him see. As for you, sir," to Jack, "I have it in my power to ruin you and your miserable paper, and I'll do it. Your competition was a lottery, and lotteries are illegal. I will go at once and denounce you to the police. Your office shall be raided, your ill-gotten goods confiscated. Ha! ha! How do you like that?" She laughed triumphantly.

"Ring off. Don't you rush it!" said Mrs. Shortland Dobbs coolly. "I have no wish to show you up, Arethusa Jenkins, but if you say a syll'ble 'bout illegal lotteries or anything of the kind to the police, I will immediately give you in charge for robbery. You had better just lie low and say nothing. You bet, I'm a woman of my word, and if I hear a word out of you, or a report that kin be traced to you, I'll act. That's all. You go this moment and give me back the coo-pone you stole from me, and then just sit down at this table and write a line acknowledging your guilt, and renouncing all claim on either of these gentlemen, or I'll have a constable fetched before you know where you are. My land! do you think we'll be bullied by a critter like you?"

Miss Jenkins resisted, protested, wept and wriggled, but Mrs. Shortland Dobbs stuck to her point.

"Say naow," said Mrs. Dobbs, "another p'int occurs to me. It said on the paper that ladies

over forty were barred, as likewise invalids, and if you, Arethusa Jenkins, are not over forty I'll——"

"I'm not," cried Miss Jenkins indignantly, "I'm only twenty-seven."

"That's a matter that kin be settled in your law-courts," said Mrs. Dobbs. "I presoom your British laws can compel certif'cates and such things to be brought forward."

"Outrageous!" exclaimed Miss Jenkins.

"Wa-al, if you think it outrageous, the best thing you can do is to sign that paper, and you'll hear no maore about it. 'Tain't no use to git mad."

After five minutes' struggle Arethusa collapsed, sank weeping into a chair, and offered to sign anything they liked, 'however false and unjust it might be.'

"It's not false, and it's not unjust," said Mrs. Dobbs, "and you know it, but just you sign and we'll not mind what you say."

Finally, Miss Jenkins signed, after many protestations, and the trio departed in triumph, bearing with them her confession and a solemn written promise to annoy Count MacCarthy de Burgo and Mr. Darracott no further.

CHAPTER XXX

MISS JENKINS HAS A PROPOSAL

AFTER the abrupt extinction of her hopes Miss Jenkins was exceedingly unhappy. To add to her misery, Messrs. Sharpe and Treadwell became unpleasant. She had been visiting their office twice and thrice a day for some time, and they were expensive acquaintances. They ran up a considerable bill against her and insisted on immediate settlement. Having raised all she could in the way of money to meet it, poor Arethusa was compelled to apply to Mr. Durham for the return of the loan that had enabled him to purchase *The Balmoral Magazine*.

The request came at an extremely awkward moment, at a crisis in his life, one of many. *The Balmoral* was about to suspend publication.

On these occasions Mr. Durham was great. His buoyancy, his hopefulness, his resourcefulness were amazing.

Undismayed he applied to one of his friends after another till he had exhausted the entire circle of possible lenders. Refused on all sides, he finally sat down and indited a letter to Miss Jenkins in which he said that unforeseen circumstances had interfered to prevent his immediate

compliance with her request. He hoped, however, to be able to send her a cheque for the entire amount due within the next few days. Having thus temporarily staved off the fair Arethusa, Mr. Durham sat down to consider how on earth was he to come by the means of fulfilling his promise.

He had heard, and nearly forgotten, that she had taken a Breach of Promise action to secure the Prize promised by *The Comet*. It struck him now he had better enquire from Messrs. Sharpe and Treadwell how that action had resulted, when he learned for the first time that the case of Miss Jenkins had fallen through.

There had been some mistake about the ticket, he was told. Another lady had been the real winner. He could not quite understand the story, nor make out which of the two men he had seen was the Prize. Moreover, the tale told him by Miss Jenkins did not seem to tally with the result of the Competition.

However, that was of little account, and he dismissed it from his mind as not concerning him. What did seem clear to him was that in this desperate strait it would be advisable to call and see whether *The Comet* might not be induced to aid Miss Jenkins financially. If a mistake had been made, surely she was entitled to compensation? He was afraid they might not look on the matter from that point of view. Still it was worth trying. If they gave even a little, it might suffice to pay something to the solicitors on account, and then perhaps Miss Jenkins might be induced to refrain for a time from calling in her loan.

"They owe her something, they do indeed," he protested to himself. So, feeling a very fine fellow, and a gallant champion of distressed womanhood, he brushed his shabby hat, and set off to call on the proprietor.

In the meantime Count MacCarthy de Burgo found reason for thankfulness that Jack had not acted on his repeated request to have the Competition annulled. He had taken quite a fancy to Mrs. Shortland Dobbs. Her bright, shrewd, worldly-wise sayings amused him immensely. Moreover, she had called on his 'old lady,' who was graciously pleased to extend towards her a degree of approval rarely bestowed by that potentate on a woman.

On her side, the good-natured little American liked the big, soft-hearted Irishman. He was kindly and amiable, and admired her immensely. Then he was a count, and that cast a glamour over all he said and did; when she saw his pedigree, she conceived for him a profound respect and admiration, feeling that no one in Shapira City could show anything to compare with it.

"Faith, that same Competition was not such a failure after all," thought MacCarthy. "Iowa is a blessed improvement on Arethusa. Sure I might do worse than ask her to name the day."

When this feat had been satisfactorily accomplished, he consulted his *fiancée* as to what he was to do with the Prize money, and told her of his desire to have it returned. He did not want to keep it, he said. She brought her common-sense to bear on the matter.

"My dear man," she said, "why not? The Competition was fair and square. I won you, and you are going to marry me, and why should the money be given back? I reckon you'll be as well able to spend it as another. Don't you be too high-toned. I am not accepting you for your riches, but it is no drawback that you should have a fortune of your own to keep up your rank properly. You should not forget that. I kin understand that in *a* fit of tempor-ary disgust at the situation, you wanted to get quit of it, but that situation is now changed. In your place I should take the money cheerfully and invest it in Real Estate. You have had considerable wear and tear, and any compensation you receive, I take it, is your due."

Accordingly the Count came round to her opinion, the sum was duly invested, and the impecunious one, for the first time in his life, entered on the enjoyment of a comfortable income. He immediately proceeded to buy his mother the very finest bath-chair to be had in London, and a complete outfit, including six new silk dresses. He then despatched her with two maids and a companion, whom she scolded all day, to a famous health resort, and ran down twice a week to see her. He next paid his landlady, with interest, and presented her with a new drawing-room carpet and a terrible suite of furniture—her own choice—upholstered in magenta rep. After that the Count wrote to a solicitor with a view to arranging to buy out the mortgagee of his Irish property. Boyle got a handsome tip and his mother was set up in a small business. Everyone, indeed, whom the Count

considered to have been a friend in his days of adversity was now rewarded, with the consent and entire approval of Mrs. Shortland Dobbs.

Just as these matters had been satisfactorily arranged, and while the Count was still in the first glow of prosperity and generosity, Mr. Durham called on Jack.

Mr. Durham was very dignified and paternal. He told a dismal story of the financial difficulties in which the unfortunate Miss Jenkins found herself involved. He pointed out that though possibly no one was to blame, a dreadful disappointment had been inflicted on that unhappy lady. In her attempt to secure what she believed to be her rights she had spent money she could ill afford. "Was it just?" he asked. "Was it generous? Was it worthy the traditions of a great paper to allow her to be at the loss?"

That Mr. Durham knew nothing of the facts was evident to Jack from the outset, and he did not feel inclined to explain why Miss Jenkins was not the injured innocent her champion pictured. He replied briefly that the unpleasant position in which Arethusa found herself was entirely the result of her own action, and he held out no hope of assistance.

The Count heard in due course about the visitor and the coolness of his claim on behalf of the lady.

"To tell the truth," burst out MacCarthy, "I'm rather glad he came. I've been feeling mean about that woman ever since we showed her up. Here am I living in luxury, with thousands at command which she expected to share, while she, poor wretch,

was driven to steal a coupon in the hopes of providing for herself. Faith, I pity her."

"That is one way of looking at it," said Otto, "but it is not my way."

"Well, it is me way," said the Count. "See the luck I've had, a sweet little woman of me own, more money than I can spend in a lifetime, and Jenkins utterly defeated. I can afford to forgive her, and do something for her."

"That of course is unanswerable," said Jack. "The money is yours, and if you wish to spend it, it is not for us to dictate to you."

The Count was not to be moved, and eventually Mr. Darracott wrote to Mr. Durham, saying that though Miss Jenkins had no claim whatever on *The Comet*, yet, in consideration of her poverty, Count MacCarthy de Burgo had determined to hand her over one thousand pounds as a free gift.

"Mistaken generosity," growled Jack as he signed the letter.

One thousand pounds! It mightily astonished Mr. Durham, whose wildest hopes had not soared beyond sixty or eighty pounds at the outside. One thousand pounds! It was splendid. It was princely. When had he had the handling of so much money? Judiciously invested in the *The Balmoral Magazine* what magnificent interest might it not yield! He could revive the publication; he could work wonders. He saw his way to a great *coup*, but he should be wary, now that he had succeeded so far beyond his expectations.

In high excitement he started off to call on Miss Jenkins.

"I thought I would call and see you, my dear Miss Jenkins," explained Mr. Durham, "and say with what regret I found myself unable to send you a cheque at once in reply to your letter, but I hope within the next few days——"

"I was so sorry to have to ask you," said Miss Jenkins, "but a—unfortunately, as I told you, I have to meet some heavy legal expenses, and—am compelled to make up the amount at once."

"Naturally, naturally," cried Mr. Durham. "Of course, of course. Under the circumstances I'd not have lost a moment, but *The Balmoral Magazine* is doing so splendidly that—a—I hesitated to withdraw even a small portion of its working capital at a critical moment."

"I'm sure I'm very sorry," said Miss Jenkins again. "I'd not have asked you to return the money if I could have seen my way to raising it in any other way."

"How like your noble generosity," cried Mr. Durham admiringly. "What a soul is yours! Yours, my dear Miss Jenkins—my dear friend—is an exceptional nature. But you must, you will let me pay you back a thousandfold. I insist. Ah! believe me, your name will go down to posterity as that of one who sought to raise the standard of literature, and by generous and timely aid lifted it from the depths to which it had fallen. The beautiful name of Arethusa Jenkins will go down to the ages hallowed by a poet's song and—er—a poet's love."

"What?" exclaimed Miss Jenkins, surprised.

"I said by a poet's love," replied Mr. Durham.

"Do you not know, have you not suspected the feelings which you have aroused in me? Be to me my Laura, my Beatrice. You will be ranked amongst the great women of the world who have inspired a poet's immortal passion. Fame will be mine, and through you. Am I rash in asking you to share it?"

Miss Jenkins was genuinely astonished.

"Oh, Mr. Durham," she truthfully exclaimed, "I did not expect this. You astonish me."

"I thought I should," said Mr. Durham triumphantly. "I concealed my sentiments when I feared you were to be the bride of another, but now he has proved a traitor——"

Miss Jenkins sighed.

"Now he has proved a traitor, I ask you to be my wife. I cannot offer you a proud title, I cannot offer you great riches, but I can offer you a true heart and undying glory. Say you will be mine."

"But do you really love me?"

"To be sure I do. All my hopes are centred in you."

"This is so sudden," whispered Miss Jenkins modestly.

"Then you refuse me?" said Mr. Durham in a voice of despair. "Oh, this is too cruel, but I will bear it like a man."

"Oh no, no!" said Miss Jenkins hastily. "I have not refused you, Mr. Durham—Archibald. Your noble sentiments find an echo in my breast. I will be yours."

"What rapture!" said Mr. Durham; "and now,

my dearest, that our interests are one, do you not think it would be well for me to arrange all these business details for you? a man can do them so much better than a woman."

"What business details?" asked Miss Jenkins.

"I mean about these legal expenses you spoke of. I think it a shame that you should pay this money."

"How can I help it?" asked Miss Jenkins.

"My dear Miss Jenkins—I mean Arethusa, you have been shamefully treated. I remember the touching story you told me, and though I did not gather very clearly which man you had known, it is evident that not you but *The Comet* should pay this bill, since it was their bad treatment drove you to take action."

"That is quite true," said Miss Jenkins. "I have often thought so myself, but how am I to make them? It seems that though my moral claim is indisputable I have no legal claim. It is a shocking iniquity."

"Leave it to me—a—darling," said Mr. Durham. "I will manage it for you. Men are better in these matters. Hitherto you have been unprotected, and they thought they could treat you as they liked. Now they have me to deal with. I will bring pressure to bear on them and compel them to treat you properly. Do you trust me, Arethusa?"

"Implicitly," said Miss Jenkins.

"Then give me one . . . only one little, little kiss. We'll have no delays," he whispered on the stairs. "The sooner we are made one the

sooner I shall feel the stimulus of your aid in the battle for fame. With you by my side I shall be inspired to fresh efforts, and oh! by the way, if I should succeed in forcing your enemies to their knees and wringing from them a trifle, will you permit me to act as your representative and give a receipt in your name? I may not succeed, of course, but if I should——"

Miss Jenkins hesitated.

"I hope, my precious, you will not object. Now you have me to take care of you, it is fitting that I should look at all the troublesome details of business for you."

"Oh, I am very good at business," said Miss Jenkins.

"Still, dearest, it is better that a man should see to such things and save you . . . a . . . my little girl . . . the bother."

Miss Jenkins had never been made love to before, and she liked it.

"Well, dear Archibald, if you wish it," she said sweetly.

"Then if I should compel your ruthless enemies to do you justice, if I should eventually bring them to their knees, I may force them to pay your costs? In that case I suppose I need not trouble to repay your loan to *The Balmoral* at once? Of course I will, if you desire it. I can bring the money to-morrow, only it seems a pity to deprive you of so fine a percentage, does it not?"

"It does, indeed," said Miss Jenkins. "How thoughtful of you. I wish it were not necessary. Of course if you could force *The Comet* in any

way to pay the costs it would be splendid, but I greatly fear you cannot."

"Well, I can but try. The memory of your wrongs will strengthen me in my campaign. If I do not succeed, I promise to return your loan at once. Now good-bye, Miss . . . a . . . I mean . . . dear Arethusa, my treasure, my only hope."

And they parted.

CHAPTER XXXI

MAISIE DECIDES

MRS. GOLIGHTLY CARTER had begun to recover her spirits and to rally her friends round her once more. Her little flat in Ridgmont Gardens was, to be sure, a very different thing from her fine house in Cleveland Square. Still it was cosy. Her exceedingly good taste in decoration had made it pretty, and some of the securities left by her husband had advanced considerably in price. She felt able to entertain a little, though on a far more modest scale, and had soon collected much the same crowd that had formerly thronged her reception rooms. The less important members were glad to come. Black suited her clear complexion and bright hair—and this was a great comfort to her, as also the fact that many people protested they could not believe she was the mother of a tall young woman like Maisie.

In her way she mourned her husband sincerely, but she was not a woman who could keep her mind fixed on any one thing for long, especially if it were sad or disagreeable.

"I am more like a man than a woman in some things," she said. "I hate to have people coming

to me to tell their woes and claim consolation, looking ugly and red-eyed and red-nosed. Why don't they shut themselves up, if they are not fit to be seen ? "

Maisie on her side regretted and mutely resented their fresh plunge into gaiety. The remembrance that her father had objected to the people who still gathered round them intensified her distaste for their society. Still, she was powerless to check her mother, and any attempt to do so would only have led to scenes which she was anxious to avoid. Whatever remonstrances Mrs. Golightly Carter had endured from her husband she would submit to none from her daughter. Accordingly Mrs. de Prazza came and went, so did the popular authoress, and the poet, the little Jew with the aureole of hair, the actress and her shrivelled mother. The Baron de Trouville put in an appearance once in company with Mrs. Coates, but finding there was no champagne, refused subsequent invitations. Mrs. Parker no longer besieged the Carters, but once they found things were not as bad as they had been represented, the strangely-attired women and the long-locked men turned up as if nothing had happened. There was also a stout gentleman on the Stock Exchange who gave much information to Mrs. Carter, for she was extremely anxious to increase her small income by judicious, strictly judicious, speculation — on certainties only.

One day Jack came down in the late afternoon and found Maisie alone. Her mother had gone to lunch with Mrs. de Prazza and Mr. Wilkes,

an actor who frequented the house more than the girl liked, and had not yet returned.

"You look tired," said Jack, as he took the cup of tea she handed him. Mr. Darracott was a privileged visitor, as the maid knew, for Maisie received no other man. She had found it was believed her change of position would make her more accessible, and in consequence had grown more reserved.

"I am tired," admitted Maisie. "Mother is giving a little party this evening, and I had to see to things. With one servant,"—she smiled wanly—"parties do not arrange themselves. I am becoming quite learned in creams and jellies, and an adept at mayonnaise."

"You have altered greatly in these last months."

"Have I not? I used to know no more of household affairs than a doll, but now I declare cookery is my chief interest."

"I did not mean in that way."

"You mean in looks," said Maisie, colouring. "I believe I have got thin, and it certainly does not suit me. I've 'gone off,' mother tells me."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Jack hastily. "To my mind you never looked better. The alteration I see is in yourself, in your way of looking at things."

"How is that? I seem to myself to be much the same." Her voice trembled a little.

"No, you are less of a little nun and more of a human woman, you are more tolerant, and while you are as careful as ever to keep your own way in what you think is right, you are less impatient with other people for not seeing as you do."

"Perhaps I know myself better," said Maisie humbly. "All the same I fear I am as unkind as ever at times. Anyone my . . . that poor papa did not like I cannot feel friendly towards, and those people are always coming here now."

"Maisie, my darling," said Jack, coming nearer and speaking very earnestly. "Will you let me take you out of it all? Do you love me, dearest? Can you love me? Oh, Maisie, don't say no. I have waited so long and so patiently for your heart to turn to me."

Maisie's eyes filled with tears and brimmed over.

"I thought you did not care for me any more," she faltered.

"Care for you? I love you a thousand and a thousand times more than ever. Look up, my own Maisie, and tell me you like me just a little."

"But have you reflected?" said Maisie wistfully. "Do you really mean it? Mother says men often change their minds."

"They are not men like me, and they do not love a girl like you."

"But I am such a poor girl now it——"

"As if that mattered," said Jack. "As if that mattered, my treasure. I have enough for both, and if you give me yourself, you give me all that I most desire in life. Come to me, Maisie."

He held out his arms.

For a second Maisie wavered towards him, and then checked herself.

"Oh, is it pity?" she said appealingly. "I am so lonely, perhaps——"

"Pity!" echoed Jack. "It is love," and he

clasped her to him. "Quick, Maisie, quick," he whispered. "Say what I have waited so long to hear. Why are you silent? Say it, my darling. Let me hear you."

"I love you," said Maisie very low, and hid her face on his shoulder.

Still holding her with one hand he turned her face and gently kissed her on the lips.

CHAPTER XXXII

FINIS

WHEN Maisie Darracott and her husband returned from their honeymoon, spent chiefly amidst the lights and shades, the flickering, tremulous greens of Mère Angélique's garden, the young wife found that Jack had prepared a surprise for her. He had purchased secretly the dear old home in Cleveland Square, and stored it with all the objects she had loved in her childhood. Some beautiful wedding-presents, too, were added to her treasures, conspicuous amongst them being a magnificent parure of sapphires and diamonds, the gift of Count and Countess MacCarthy de Burgo. Boyle entered Mr. Darracott's service as page-boy, and is as dignified as ever in his manner. He hopes to grow up to be a footman.

Maisie's mother still resides in Ridgmont Gardens. Having made two or three lucky ventures under the guidance of her friend of the Stock Exchange, she married Mr. Wilkes, the good-looking young actor. They quickly ran through her small fortune. He then deserted her, and went to America. She lives on an annuity of four hundred a year, settled on her by Jack, whom she often reproaches for his

meanness, because he sternly refuses to let her contract debts.

As indicated above, Count MacCarthy de Burgo married Mrs. Shortland Dobbs after a brief wooing, and his admiration for her is unbounded. The Count and Countess divide their time between Ireland and Shapira City, New York State, where the Countess is now an acknowledged leader of society. She ranks far above the Plants and Bruces in right of her title and her more ancient royal descent, and is an authority on matters of etiquette and the aristocracy of Europe. Soon after their wedding, which was very quiet, the newly-married pair visited the Count's estate in Ireland, and, the mortgages having been paid off, set about repairing the ancestral dwelling of the MacCarthys, which sadly needed paint, paper, drainage, and a new roof. The Countess has fitted it up with electric lights, elevators, and all the latest American improvements. She is the Lady Bountiful of the neighbourhood, and in her brisk way has done an immensity of good, by erecting model cottages and establishing a School of Housewifery on the estate. The feudal atmosphere of the castle enchants her, and, though looked on as eccentric, she is extremely popular. She is rather too much given to boasting of the antiquity of her own and her husband's family, but fortunately for her such speeches do not attract as much ridicule in Ireland as in other countries. Having a shrewd eye to the main chance, she has persuaded her husband to establish a factory for compressing peat, furnished with the newest American

machinery, thereby affording employment to many.

Her wealth, and especially her diamonds, make the Countess an object of interest to the poor county families who know nothing of the secret of how her marriage was brought about. The simple country ladies are charmed with her woman-of-the-world air, and actually admire her accent as much as she their soft brogue. She receives 'quite nice people' at Castle de Burgo, and entertains generously yet with prudence. The Count's mother came back in triumph to her old home. There were bonfires and a feast for the tenantry to celebrate the occasion. She admits that if her boy was to marry at all, he might have done worse; though she thinks little of Americans in general, and esteems the Countess an amazingly lucky woman.

When the Count and his wife visit London they are cordially received by Jack Darracott and Maisie, to whose little son they are god-parents. The one thing that charms the Countess is to meet people about whom she can talk in Shapira City, and knowing her weakness Maisie always draws up a special list of guests with titles.

When Miss Jenkins learned, to her surprise, that Mr. Durham had mysteriously succeeded in compelling *The Comet* to pay her costs, and hand over to her the balance of a thousand pounds, she promptly married her champion. Thanks to this, *The Balmoral Magazine* has secured a new lease of life, but only to the extent of two hundred pounds, on which Mr. Durham insisted before he would

undertake to carry out his engagement. He is confident that when a novel which he has just completed makes its appearance as the leading serial, the magazine will bound into popularity and he into wealth. Under the rule of the second Mrs. Durham three of the Durham boys have run away from home, which lessens the family expenses. Mr. Durham finds his wife less confident in his powers than before their marriage. This pains him, but he feels sure the new serial will bring her round. He regrets that he did not insist before marriage on the entire balance of the thousand pounds being invested in *The Balmoral*, indeed he would have refused to wed Miss Jenkins on any other condition, but that he was afraid if he went too far that she might require him to repay the original loan. There was no danger of that, as at the time Miss Jenkins would have conceded anything rather than remain unwedded, but this Mr. Durham did not know until it was too late.

The new Mrs. Durham, now secure of her position, insists on her ' rights ' after a fashion very different from poor Ellen, on whom Mr. Durham sometimes looks back with regret. She shares her husband's meals, requires new dresses, and otherwise acts as if she were his equal, which annoys him.

He has not expressed this feeling, however, as he is kept in far better order than in the past.

Otto Hazlitt is still unmarried. He says he will wait until he finds a wife exactly like Maisie.

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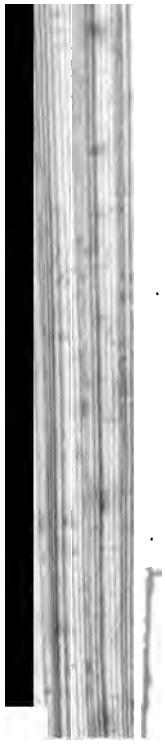

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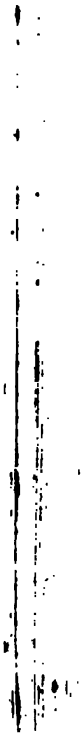

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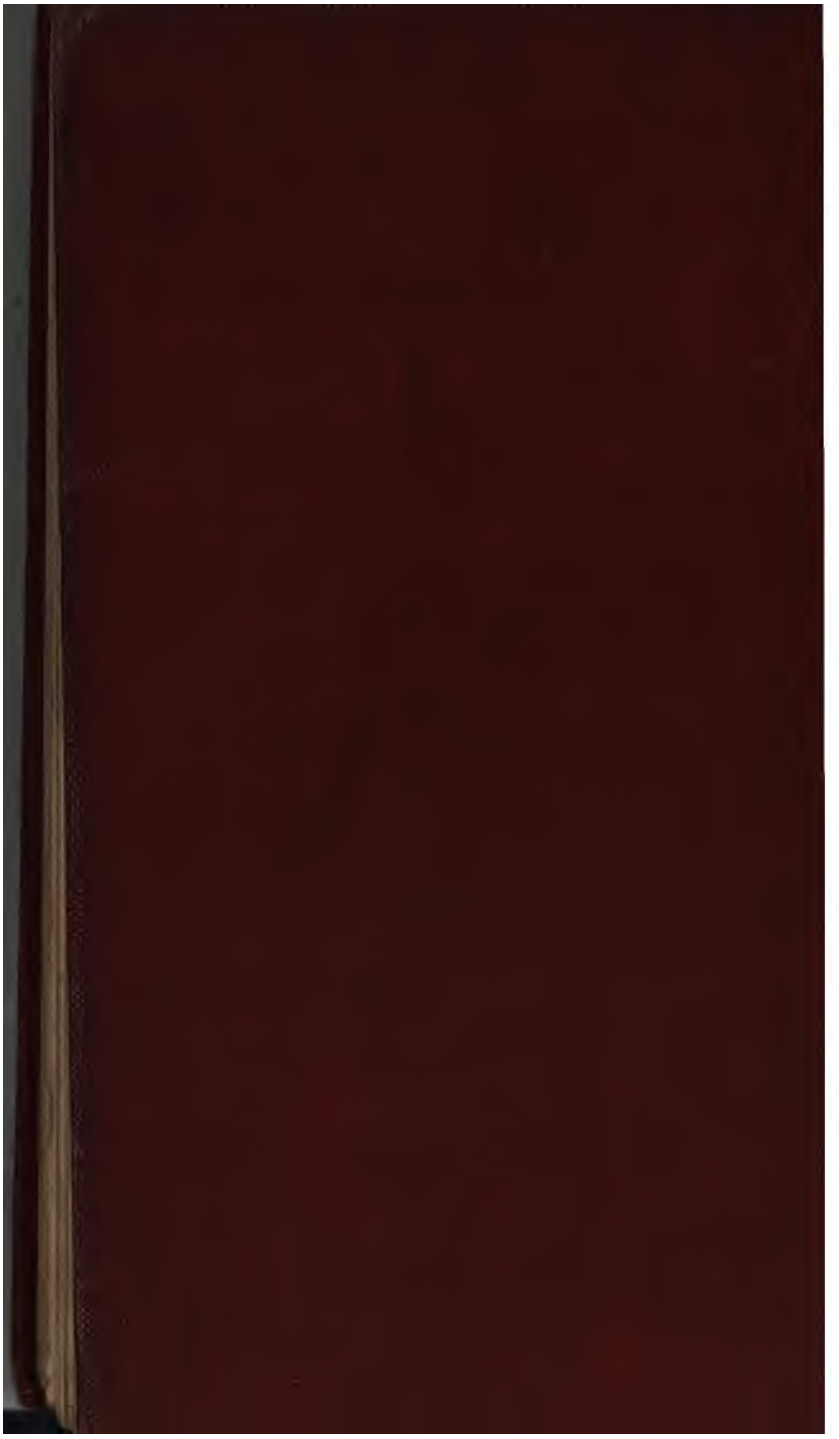
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